

And now... for something seriously and completely different.

F.F.O.

Prologue

Sever Ties

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Tuesday.

Today was a fine day.

"How many times did I tell you!?" Hermione yelled into Harry's ear angrily.

"Eleven times already, Hermione! Eleven times!" Harry yelled back.

"Wow, you even took count?" Hermione said in mock amazement, "and I thought Ron was the dunderheaded one!"

Harry stood up and looked at Hermione with a serious yet sly look.

"Oh, now you finally accepted how smarter you are than anyone else in the school? I guess that's why your head can be as large as the squid's."

Hermione scoffed at such a cheap way to get on her nerves.

"Harry, don't use Malfoy's words against me, otherwise, you are just stooping down to his level," she said in a matter-of-factly tone.

"I would do so if you stop nagging me to do stuff that I am not accommodated to do at the moment!" Harry replied angrily.

"Alright guys, you have to stop!" shouted a voice who butted in the argument "It's usually me and Hermione who should be doing that!" said Ron as he went between the two

"Well, if Harry would just cooperate then maybe I can tone my mood down a bit!" Hermione spat.

“She started it,” said Harry rather immaturely than he intended it to be.

“Fine, blame the one who always have to ruin your day,” said Hermione crossing her arms and looked away.

Harry mimicked her and started thinking about how this stupid argument started. And all because of a complex school project their Head of House gave them....

The whole concept of the assignment made Hermione go past the limits of how hardworking she was. It even went pass the point where she started acting arrogant and too ambitious for her own good.

“Done with arguing? Good,” said Ron after a long silence. “Look, I know you two are still sore at each other but I don’t want you to sever ties because of a stupid school project!”

Harry looked down and felt a bit guilty after delaying the work to Hermione for the past few weeks. And with the projects being due next week, the three barely got anything done apart from a few suggestions by Ron regarding a cactus that can attack.

Despite the anger that boiled within him, Harry wanted to end this dispute with Hermione. He has always grown up with her bossiness to an extent where he found it tolerable. He even grew fond of her for being so.

Harry glanced over his shoulder to see Hermione biting her lower lip and tapping her finger against her arm as they were crossed.

Another long and tense silence came that made Harry feel more awkward than ever. He wanted to leave the empty classroom he, Hermione and Ron went in earlier right after Transfiguration ended.

“You know...” said Hermione finally, “If you can just cooperate with me then maybe –”

For some reason, Harry couldn’t take it no more.

“Alright, alright!” he wheeled on her without considering how premature he bit her head off, “You want me to cooperate? Fine! Just don’t go bossy all over me!” he said walking towards her, “If you want to go breathe down my neck and say things that make me sound pathetic or immature then fine with me! I don’t care! Just say anything! I’ll follow!”

“Please stop!” yelled Ron, covering his ears.

“Oh, so that’s what you think?” Hermione retorted sternly, “That I’m some pretentious know-it-all? Because you know what, Harry?” she walked towards him, “If –” she poked him on the chest hard, “- you think –” she poked him again even harder, “– I’m some terrible, jerk then I don’t think I should –” she poked him again, “- work with you at all!”

“Would you stop that!” said Harry loudly and pushed Hermione away from him making her hit her back on the bookshelf behind her.

Harry gasped. He didn’t mean to hurt her!

“Oh boy,” said Ron shaking his head as he palmed his face.

Nothing was there but pure silence between the three... Harry really wanted to leave so he could avoid the teary face of Hermione. Hermione somehow had the same idea and was less hesitant to do so since she walked out of the room without a word.

Harry turned to Ron who sighed.

“Now what are we going to do?” Ron groaned, “Blimey, and all of this pressure in just making your own mythology? What do we have? Nothing! Parvati and Lavender made their own mythology with their own history, race, clan, stories, and everything while Neville, Seamus and Dean got some steam punk type mythology... I asked them and they told me it took them ages to figure their projects out!” he swore under his breathe, “The clock is ticking now... and with Hermione out of the way, I doubt we will get the project done.”

“She’ll turn up,” said Harry after being silent for a long time. “You know her... she’s very articulate.”

“Well,” said Ron looking at the door where Hermione exited, “knowing her, I bet she’ll turn up in about week’s time/”

“Or if I’m lucky, months,” said Harry in grim humor.

Ron made a dry laugh.

“Don’t say that,”

Harry didn’t answer Ron. Instead, he left the room ignoring whatever thoughts could be in Ron’s mind right now on what just happened.

- - -

“Potter – Granger. In the backroom of the class, now!” yelled the booming, gruff voice of Rapticon Sr., the Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher of that year.

“Now look what you made me do?” Hermione hissed as she and Harry stood up and walked towards the backroom of the classroom as the eyes of the other students followed them. Harry couldn’t believe he hit Hermione’s hand out of frustration... and here he was thinking that he could finally mend ties with her.

Hermione and Harry opened the old oak door and entered a deserted, small room which looked as if a house elf cleaned here every hour.

“Oooh, I hope I don’t get any deductions,” Hermione said anxiously as she leaned back against the stone wall.

Harry looked out the window and saw the late January afternoon sun shimmering across the lake. If only he could fix his friendship with Hermione then maybe he could truly enjoy the beauty of the horizon.

The door opened making all tensions gone. Rapticon Sr. wasn’t your ordinary human. He was that of a humanoid version of a velociraptor (you may refer to the author’s biography to see a diagram of Rapticon

Sr.), his build was fit, slick and he looked quite nimble. The color of his scales was orange with a tinge of black that spread from the top of his head to the very back of his spine. He had large black slits for eyes that rested on his pale green (so pale that one could mistake it for being white) eyeballs.

Rapticon Sr. wore brown robes and matching brown boots and gloves. He wore gloves and boots at all times to keep his raptor claws from the first years since it came to his attention that it scares them severely.

The professor closed the door (Harry noticed his classmates leave the room through the narrow opening before the door closed shut) and turned to the two Gryffindors, his face contorted with much irate.

“Look,” he said calmly, “Before I yell my ass off in here, tell me... what the (he said a word that made Hermione gasp) is going between the two of you?” his strict face then switched to a face of concern, “At the beginning of the school year, you two were all this –” he twisted his index and middle fingers together, “- but after the holidays I see you two are – er – something like – pssh!” he said as he made a falling whistling noise whilst he gestured his hand falling down as if he was making an notion of a falling airplane. “I dunno what’s going on between the two of you and I’m pretty sure you can handle your little problem soon but please, oh please, don’t throw the heat during my class... you got that Harry?” he turned to Harry.

Harry nodded.

“Hermione?”

Hermione looked down and nodded. Rapticon Sr. sighed.

“If you’re thinking whether if I’ll deduct your grade for misconduct in my class then fret no more because I’m not going to.”

Harry saw Hermione look up and made a furtive smile.

“Will you two promise me that you won’t do this again?” asked Rapticon Sr.

Hermione and Harry nodded.

“Good!” he said smiling, opening the door, “you can go now.”

Hermione walked first outside and went back to empty classroom. Harry didn't budge because he was expecting Rapticon Sr. to get out first before he could follow.

“What's wrong?” asked Rapticon Sr. “Your look of uncertainty intrigues me, Harry,” he added with a grin.

“N-nothing...” said Harry, looking at his shoes, “I was just – er - hoping I could fix our friendship again....”

“I can guess it's something about schoolwork, eh?” said Rapticon Sr. closing the door behind him and crossing his arms.

Harry smiled sadly.

“Yeah... something like that. How d'you - ?”

“Harry,” Rapticon Sr. cut Harry off as he stood beside him, leaning against the wall. “This school project about making your own mythology sprouted lots of disagreements among the student body... and imagine the questions: what should we do? What should we put in? What should we put out? Is this good? Or bad? Really complicated dung if you ask me.... I bet every piece of my Galleons that you and Hermione had a disagreement with one aspect in your mythology, eh?”

“No,” said Harry weakly. “Most of it is my fault, really. Let's say that I'm kind of lazy to do the project....”

“There ya go,” said Rapticon Sr. ecstatically, “You know Hermione more than anyone in this room (well, we're the only ones in this room) and I think in her defense, you should know better than to go run-of-the-mill like that!”

“But she gets too – erm – bossy that I can't take it anymore.”

“Everyone has their flaws,” said Rapticon Sr. acutely. “Everyone can be stupid about their attitudes. I mean, look at me; remember when I went overboard at the whole mummy thing?”

“Yes,” said Harry dully.

“I was too confident. I was a fool,” said Rapticon Sr., “Which is why we should just be aware that there is no perfect bastard in this world, alright?” he smiled at Harry.

Harry didn’t know say anything but he smiled weakly.

“Anyway, Ron is in your group, right?” asked Rapticon Sr.

“Yes...” said Harry, the reality of the project falling back to him. “I feel bad though, he’s usually between me and Hermione, keeping us apart from biting each others’ head off if you know what I mean.”

“Oh, yes,” said the professor sagely. “I find it quite queer that you and Hermione are fighting instead of the other way around... meaning Ron versus Hermione.” said Rapticon Sr. grinning slyly.

“Ron said the same thing...” Harry chuckled then sighed. “The project is due next week and we got nothing.”

“Ouch,” Rapticon Sr. winced, “and the project is what... written-form, right?”

“We have to write a new and original mythology and compile the information into a book...” said Harry, recalling McGonagall’s instructions. “Kinda like a history book.”

“That’s major owie” Rapticon Sr. said, shaking his head. “Make something new and original and you got a week left? I’d stick to Bumblefoot instead!”

“Well, there’s a plus,” said Harry, “we have the option to use other reference books to help us in creating the mythology... you know, get ideas but not completely copy them.”

“Reference, eh?” Rapticon Sr. rubbed his chin thoughtfully.
“Hmmm....”

Harry wondered why Professor Raptor was looking thoughtful but thought no further when he finally spoke.

“I got it!” he turned to Harry, “Look, I can see that you are not in a pleasant mood at the moment so tell you what,” he walked in front of him, “I’ll write my friend a letter to bring an book which contains some original stuff he made up back then.... He’ll be delighted about it! He has always found it flattering if someone tried to use his creations. You can use the content to give you ideas – and more importantly – a great head start on what you can do.”

“Really?” said Harry his face lighting up, “That would be great! That would make Hermione happy!”

“And mind you, she’ll be impressed by you,” said Rapticon Sr., winking. “Remember, like in every bibliography; don’t forget to credit the original source where your mythology has been inspired from.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t,” said Harry, feeling happier than a minute ago. “By the way, who is the guy anyway? The one who made the book?”

“A friend of mine,” said Rapticon Sr. “He’s friendly and articulate enough to lend it to you.”

“Thanks, sir,” said Harry, imagining the happy face of Hermione with his mind’s eye.

“No problemo, just remember to tone the mood down between the two of you,” he said, opening the door, “Now hurry, I have lectures about a dragon I’d want to discuss with the next class.”

“Okay,” said Harry joyfully, “by the way... did your friend give a name of this book?”

Rapticon Sr.’s pouted questioningly as he wondered.

“Not really sure... ‘Last Fantasia’? or was it ‘Fantasy’? Can’t really say.... You’ll just have to wait for the morrow. You can get it from me during lunchtime.”

“Got it!” said Harry happily.

If this book, this deus ex machina, can help them in their mythology then maybe, just maybe, he and Hermione can be friends again.

“Harry, I can see the lil midgets out there,” said Rapticon Sr. looking through the door, referring to the first years. “I think it’s time you make your way,”

“Oh, yeah,” said Harry, getting out of his reverie. “I forgot – er, thanks, Professor.”

“Don’t mention it,” said Rapticon Sr., “Just remember, don’t result in severing ties.”

“Don’t worry,” said Harry, walking towards the door, “I won’t.”

And Harry left the backroom leaving Rapticon Sr. alone. He seemed to be deep in thought on a matter.

“Hmmm... what was its name again?” said Rapticon Sr. leaving the room as he locked the door. “Ah, yes!” he nodded, “F.F.O., was it?” he paused for a moment, “Don’t know what that means....”

Rapticon Sr. walked away leaving the door alone at its wake and began his lesson to the first years, all the while that Harry left the classroom feeling much happier than he did an hour ago.

Indeed, I reiterate, today was a fine day.

Chapter One

F. F. O.

Harry entered Rapticon Sr.'s office during lunchtime.

"Sir?" he asked finding the professor sitting behind the desk.

"Yes, Harry?"

"Er... I came here for the – you know," said Harry timidly, "the book?"

"Ah yes!" said Rapticon Sr., "It hasn't arrived yet but I assure you, expect it around mid-afternoon. My friend lives very far from her, you see."

"S-so...." Harry said, not quite sure what to say next.

"Don't worry, Harry," said Rapticon Sr. wryly, "If all things go well, the book will be soaring into my windowsill by twilight! Don't worry about it."

Harry sighed and sat down on the chair in front of the desk. He expected it to be here at this time... he wanted to show Hermione that he had something to contribute to their project and more importantly, show that he wanted to be friends with her again.

"Er... sir? I have a bit of a question" Harry asked after something occurred to him.

"Fire away, Harry," he said, interlocking his hands together and rested them on the table.

"Um," Harry continued, "Don't you think that this – er – this book we're borrowing and – well – using its content some sort of plagiarism?"

"Plagiarism? You're just getting ideas, it's not like you're going to copy the whole thing!" he chuckled then looked at Harry in humorous leer. "Are ya?"

“N-no,” said Harry, shaking his head. “I – I just wanted to know that little detail....”

“Let me tell you one thing, Harry,” said Rapticon Sr. waving a finger at him, “My friend will be flattered if you use the content in his book but I doubt it would be called plagiarism if you’re just using some of his ideas! I mean, we’re in this time of the world where originality is hard to come by – I just saw Patil and Brown’s work and I noticed they borrowed heavily from C.S. Lewis works but still kept it fresh and neat. And Malfoy’s got a Stephen King-Dark Tower thing goin’ on – worry not, Harry, you’re in the same page as they are.”

To be frank, Harry thought, he knew particularly what Professor Raptor meant but didn’t know who Stephen King or C.S. Lewis was. But the thought of other students doing the same thing as he was eased him.

“Speaking of books, Harry... did you manage to read Y.F. Kelton’s book?” asked Rapticon Sr., standing up from his seat as he took out a glass and a bottle of wine and started pouring the contents of the bottle into the wine glass.

“The latest one?” said Harry, quite surprise at the question.

“Yeah, the sixth one of the Adrian Porter series.”

“I read it,” said Harry and looked out the window, “The book is great and all I have to admit that Kelton’s writing is getting better by the pages.”

“I see,” said Rapticon Sr. as he took a sip.

“So...” Harry spoke, looking a bit sheepish. “What did you think of Beatrix going with Allan instead of going with Adrian?”

Rapticon Sr. looked at Harry.

“Is that a shipper question?”

"Yes..." said Harry, feeling quite dumb for discussing this. "That's where I'm disappointed about the book... I was – er - rooting that Beatrix and Adrian would be together instead of Beatrix and Allan," Harry said sounding a bit off.

"I don't mind at all... I am support the relationship of Adrian and Beatrix."

Harry looked at his professor.

"Aren't you bothered that the ship has 'sunk'?"

"Sunk? What do you mean 'sunk'?" Rapticon Sr. gave Harry a look of confusion, "If this is about shipping wars then count me out of it... Sure, it is frustrating for you B/Ad shippers that B/AI won but remember that they are just characters... nothing more and nothing less."

Harry knew this point and thought it was best to listen further on Professor Raptor's point.

"And for the sake of the fan writers who write fan stories at that magazine," Rapticon Sr. continued. "They should know that they are not limited to the books... I mean, sure, people who supports the Beatrix and Allan relationship have their trophy but think about it – the fan writers of that relationship will now lack the story now that they got what they want. The other side, that is, Beatrix and Adrian, have all the creativity in the world." He sipped his glass "And that is what makes all the difference in the world."

"Well," said Harry "I just hate it when people mention that 'the B/Ad ship has sunk!' It gets annoying..."

"That's when your control of mind and emotions come into place... people who think that shipping is 'a big part of life' are just thinking too much. Serious business, I tell ya! At the bright side of the situation, people should not limit themselves to things... Think big, I say! Think big!"

From that moment on, Harry knew that nothing can best what Rapticon Sr. explained about shipping in Kelton's book series.

"Anything else you want to say, Harry?" Rapticon Sr. asked, taking in what's left of his wine glass.

"N-nothing... thanks anyway for the talk," said Harry, smiling.

"No prob. When you need anything, you know where to go to," said Rapticon Sr., placing his glass on the desk, "By the way, the book will surely be here around mid-afternoon so get ready for the delivery, okay?"

"Okay," Harry said as he walked towards the door, "Thanks!"

And with that, Harry left the office, closing the door behind him.

- - -

The castle of Hogwarts goes about its business in its own special way: students go to the library to catch up on their schoolwork, Hagrid does his groundkeeping duties and the giant squid just swims about the lake naturally. There's nothing interesting at this time, for now in the grounds of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Thousands of miles away, at the coast of an island, lay a misty horizon; towering above the calm and cold waters stood a rock making eagle-talon like formations. The rock seems to be inhabited for windows can be seen from the sides of the crag facing towards the mainland island.

Inside this house made of rock lived an elder who stood by barely six feet tall. He was old but had the energy of a cheetah. His quarters looked that of medieval times. Shields stood at the side of the walls while skinned animal fur served as his bed sheets and carpet. Lastly, a cauldron was boiling idly and dully in the center of the circular room.

"With another tinge of coffee, I can turn in for a night's rest," said the elder, moving towards the fireplace where a kettle was steaming.

His attention of the kettle seemed to dwindle for something has opened his window in the quick of a flash. The torrent winds from the misty coast rushed in bringing the elder towards the window to close it keeping his domain warm and cozy once more.

“What on earth would open my window?” he wondered, “And at this time of night?” he looked around to find his answer.

A screech owl was perched on top of his cauldron, keeping itself warm by the heat the large pot exuded. Before the elder wondered about this arrival, he instantly spotted a letter on its beak. The gold color of the envelope gave away the sender.

“Dimitri,” he muttered with a smile, “what does he want this time?”

He bent over towards the owl and held out his hand asking for the letter. As if it knew what he wanted, the owl dropped the letter at his hand.

The elder settled himself down with a cup of coffee and sat behind his desk.

“Let’s see what he has in mind at the moment,”

The elder tore the envelope open and took out the letter, reading it as he sipped his coffee:

Dear Accula,

Is everything alright with you? I hope you’re fine. Everything’s fine right here in the United Kingdom with all the teaching, interacting with other people and magic books.

Speaking of books, do you still have that mythological book of yours? The one entitled “F.F.O.”?

If you still have it, I’m asking you a favor: if I have your consent (oh dear, will this be hard? Haha!) then I’d like it if you send it to me pronto. You see, these kids are having a big project about making their own mythology with original concepts, creatures and everything.

I intrigued this friend of mine about your book and he seems willing to “pick your brain” if you know what I mean! Don’t worry, all credentials will be entrusted to you so you can relax and drink a hearty drink!

Anyway, I hope you can accept, my friend. Pray tell, when was the last time you failed to help me? Haha!

It would be great to see your creations be used and praised for, eh?

What do you say, old friend? If you agree then I expect a reply to be the book itself.

Thanks!

From,

Dimitri Rapticon Raptor Sr.

“Anything for you, my friend,” he said, smiling as he stood up. He walked towards an old bookshelf that bent in a curve to entertain its spot at the circular room. A few minutes later, he was already scanning the spines for the name “F.F.O.” in his bookshelf.

F.F.O... that book which he drew out creations and concepts made him to make something new. Not only did he make a whole book about concepts but he made two versions of it.

The first was a drawing book where the reader can use his or her imagination to make out stories and concepts while the second one was a book where all of the fictional history, characters, and creatures are made into one whole myth. The second one wasn’t just an ordinary book though... he charmed it with powerful magic to seal it from prying eyes because whoever opens it will meet twist of fates by the numbers.

“Ah, there it is!” he finally said as he took out a blue book that had its title peeling off from the leather cover. A brass rusty lock kept the book from opening.

"I bet those wizards in England can do a little magic to unlock this one," the elder said thoughtfully, observing the lock. He looked at the owl who was still keeping itself warm above the cauldron's steam. "Ready for another flight, my little friend?"

The owl hooted in delight and glided towards him.

"There you go," he said minutes later, tying the large package to the owl's leg. The package contained the book and a letter of reply. "Amazing creatures, owls... they can carry stuff as heavy as a large rock!" he chuckled.

The elder walked towards the window, opened it and gladly gave the owl passage for flight. Luckily, the torrent of winds had calmed down giving way for the owl to fly away into the moonlight with ease. The elder squinted at the distance as the clouds devoured the owl from sight.

"Now where's my coffee?" he wondered, looking around.

And the elder drank his coffee.

- - -

It was the end of Thursday classes and we see Harry pacing back and forth in the common room, waiting for the time Rapticon Sr. will send him Hedwig, announcing the book's arrival.

"I hope it comes in time," Harry looked at his wristwatch. It was half-past three.

Harry continued pacing back and forth. He wanted to see Hermione smile at him in her own terms... he just wanted Hermione to be friends with him again. He didn't want her to be angry with him. It started to make him feel guilty.

"Procrastinating is such a bad thing to do, Harry," said a voice from the portrait hole.

Harry jumped and turned to see Hermione, arms wrapped around a large book, her face looking very strict.

“Oh, hi,” said Harry gingerly.

“Look, if you want this project done with and let bygones be bygones then I suggest we start doing some work now.” Hermione said as she walked over to a table and sat, “Come and help me here, Harry,” she looked at him as she opened the large book.

Without saying a word, Harry traipsed and sat down beside her.

“So, if we start drawing out some creatures now, our mythology will have a bestiary by six o’clock... and while you and Ron - who’ll be here in a moment - will write some descriptions about the monsters. I will write up some illusory history about the mythology... is that okay with you?”

Harry realized she was talking about the project and just gave her a nod. Harry didn’t know why but he just kept his mouth shut, afraid that once he speaks, he might start another argument with her. It might’ve concerned Hermione because she was looking at him with concentration, suspicious of his obedience and silence. Harry braced for an irritated question from her but was surprise that her strict face turned to a frown of worry.

“Harry,” said Hermione gently, “Look, I’m sorry about the past few days and I hope we can get this right before Tuesday...” she looked at him with a look that Harry could tell that it was filled with apology. “I know you didn’t mean to hurt me the other day... of course,” she glanced at the large book and back at Harry, “I... felt bad... that – you know – tried to hurt me... but I know you didn’t mean it....”

“I didn’t,” said Harry, feeling relieved at the direction of this conversation. It was the first proper conversation they had in a long time. “Hermione, I’m telling the truth when I say this: I don’t want to lose you,” he blinked, feeling quite embarrassed at what he just said, “I don’t want to lose my best friend over this... I’m sorry.”

Hermione's lip trembled and instantly, she stood up, leaned over and hugged Harry around his neck in a tight embrace, her chin resting on Harry's jet-black hair.

"Oh, Harry..." she quietly said as she kissed him on the head. "I don't want to lose you too...."

Harry smiled from ear to ear.... It was all he wanted. He wrapped his hands around her waist and hugged her back, his head against her body as caught the whiff of cinnamon that exuded from her hair. There was nothing but silence between the two. The love and care they had for each was profound at the moment that Harry wished they'd be like this for a long time....

It was nice.

But the sudden thought of the book Rapticon Sr. offered to him. Should he tell her?

"Hermione," Harry said pushing her away slowly, "I – uh – er..."

"What?" Hermione asked, taking a seat.

"About the mythology thing... er, I have it all figured out," Harry said, rubbing his shoulder awkwardly.

Hermione tilted her head.

"Really? What do you mean?"

"Er – Professor Raptor said he will lend us a book from a friend which contains some material that can help us make a mythology – don't worry –" Harry said quickly before Hermione could revolt about plagiarism, "We're just gonna pick his brain! We just have to credit him, that's all!"

Hermione's face looked unsure.

"I don't know... I can't really put a finger into it" she said, biting her finger.

“Hermione,” said Harry wryly, “Look at the facts: we have no project at the moment and this can give us a head start. If we do this now with the help of the book then maybe we’ll be done by tomorrow or by Saturday!”

Hermione rubbed her chin.

“Are you sure about this?” she said, “Professor Raptor is nice and all but I feel like I’m going into a situation I can’t handle.”

“What can’t you handle, Hermione?” Harry asked wittingly.

She sighed.

“Alright,” she said, pursing her lips, “it’s a wild card but there are times where we need to open the envelope then,” she smiled at Harry.

Harry’s mind shouted a “Yes!”. At this moment, the portrait hole opened and Ron clambered in, carrying a case of drawing materials.

“Here ya go!” he said walking towards them, dropping the stuff on the table “All borrowed from Hagrid! – What’s going on?” he asked catching the smirk on Harry’s and Hermione’s faces.

He looked at them and his face spread into realization.

“Let me guess, you two made up, didn’t you?”

“You are a smart one, Ron.” Hermione said, reaching up to stroke his red hair jokingly.

“Yeah, yeah,” he said at once, jerking his head away from Hermione’s reach, “Good for you, good for you but let’s get started, shall we?”

Then in an instant, Hermione told Ron about the book Professor Raptor offered to them which led Ron to make a long comical lecture on how the two treated him like some servant boy.

- - -

"Sir! I received your letter!" Harry came in bursting into the office of Rapticon Sr., "The book's here, isn't?"

Standing by his window, Rapticon Sr. nodded and pointed to his desk where an old blue leather book lay. Harry observed it; it looked old with its title peeling off and scratches at the spine. What bound the book together was a rusty brass lock.

"Ten Knuts say that my friend was confident that you'd use 'Alohomora' on it," said Rapticon Sr., following Harry's gaze of the lock. "Rape its info all you want Harry, it's your concern now," Rapticon Sr. added with sarcasm, smirking down at Harry's face of wanting. "Good luck."

"Thanks a bunch, sir," said Harry, carrying the book under his arm. "By the way, Hermione and I just made up!"

"Really? That's good, that's good! Things are looking up aren't they?" Rapticon Sr. said, joyfully, "Well, anyhow, go on and do the project, time's a-wasting!"

After another "Thank you", Harry ran out of the room, waving the professor goodbye as he did so. His spirits rising soar, Harry ran towards the common room where Hermione and Ron awaited.

"I got it! I got it!" Harry said as he jetted down the common room and sat beside his two friends.

"That's great!" Ron said, putting down his quill. "Now we can finally get to work!"

"So this is the book..." Hermione looked at it in awe, observing the ridges that dressed the leather front, "It looks really old..." she examined it on the back "Z. T. Accula..."

"Excuse me?" Ron asked.

“The author,” Hermione said, facing the book’s back to him, “Z.T. Accula is the one who made this...” she looked at the lock, “you want to open it?”

“And get this project done? Sure, why not?” said Harry, “Rapticon Sr. reckons we can just use Alohomora on the lock.”

“Okay,” Hermione took out her wand and gazed at the book. Harry noted her unusually hesitant face.

“What’s wrong?” Ron asked, shifting a little closer to see if the book had something on the surface.

“I’m not sure...” said Hermione, backing away, “I just have this gut feeling that something dreadful is about to happen....”

“From opening a book?” Ron said in aghast, “That’s like a flobberworm infestation! Big deal! Just open the damn book and let’s get to work!”

“Ron, you have got to learn safety precautions at times! Remember Ginny and Tom Riddle’s diary?” said Hermione sternly, then continued before Ron could respond, “But since you want it, fine. Alohomora!”

The lock made a clicking sound; it was unlocked. Harry starched his fingers and turned the lock away from the book.

“Let’s see what Mr. Accula has in store for us,” said Harry, feeling unusually tense.

And thus, they opened the leather-bound tome....

- - -

The elder woke up from his sleep after realizing something that made him feel grave. What was it that woke him up at – he looked at the old clock on his wall – two thirty in the morning?

He swung his legs off the bed and looked around the dimly lit room where he lived in. His bedroom shared the circular room where all the other quarters were. He stood up and looked out the window; there was a storm raging outside. He felt lucky that he was warm and cozy in his quarters but the storm wasn't the one bothering him... it was something else.

What was it? He wondered.

The aged senior looked around the room and tried to see if anything caught his interest. He looked at his boiling cauldron which was boiling hot water (to keep the place warm and snug). His study had nothing but his old books and his walking staff... nothing there.

What was it that bothered him to wake up?

Then in quick lighting, he realized it.

The elder ran towards the bookshelf and started searching it vigorously. He looked into his potion books, history books, story books, everything. It took him time until he pulled out the book that answered his question on what was bothering him.

A flash of lighting flickered in the room, lighting the dark corners of the circular room and the cover of the book the elder held. Through the brief light, the elder saw a brief glimpse of the book's title: it was titled "F.F.O.". It was blue leather-bound and had its title peeling off... just like the book he sent to Dimitri.

But what differed from the one he sent and the book he has now was that the other has a lock... this one, the tome in his hand, did not. Dreadfully, he opened the book and was greeted by conceptual drawings and sketches of creatures, knights, princesses, elves, dwarves, all made in his original imagination. Another flash of lightning showed the drawings looking up at him as if they were old friends. He sighed in fear and looked out the window, now splattered with heavy rain from the sea.

"By King Leo's name... I am fool!" he gasped.

He has made a mistake, a grave mistake. The book he had sent Rapticon Sr. wasn't meant to be sent! Two books, identical in appearance differ from each other for one specific thing, the elder thought. If one opens the book Dimitri has then unspeakable things will happen! How foolish could he be?

"I have to stop them from opening that book!" the elder said urgently.

How can he go to Hogwarts in time? Yes... he knew Dimitri was in Hogwarts. How many times did the raptor tell him that fact in his letters?

"Hogwarts..." muttered the elder as if it was a prayer. "I need to go there... and warn Dimitri... I hope my magic will suffice for the trip."

Knowing what's best, he stood up, grabbed his cloak, his walking staff, the book "F.F.O." and went out for the journey to Hogwarts... a short journey.

- - -

"Harry..." Hermione said slowly, "What are we supposed to see in here?"

Harry gulped and looked into the blank page of the book. In fact, every book seemed to blank, every last paper!

"I – I s-swear there was supposed to be something in there!" said Harry alarmingly, scanning the pages, "Professor Raptor said so, himself!"

"That's what you call 'lying'," said Hermione, her voice rising, "Oh, Harry, I can't believe you wasted our time!" she stood up and thrust the book on Harry's fingers, "If we had started the project as planned, we could've ended it by –" she looked at her watch, "- now! Oh, God, Harry... I can't believe we wasted our time!"

Harry stood up, rubbing his fingers.

“Hey, I didn’t just do this to play for laughs! I-I thought there would be something good in it and then – then there is –”

“Nothing! That’s what!” Hermione said, “Ooooh, Harry there are times where you can be so naïve!”

“Hermione, please!” said Harry pleadingly, he didn’t want this to happen... Rapticon Sr. assured him that there would be something in the book! Was he lying?

“The damage has been done, Harry!” said Hermione at once, “If you don’t mind, we have some important things to do so if you want our project done by midnight then I suggest you cooperate!”

Harry shook his fist furtively. How could this happen? It was like the hug they shared awhile ago never happened! Hermione was being unreasonable. All he wanted was to toss something at her just to let her see the truth.

“Fine!” Harry blurted out and with a turn of the heel, he headed straight for the portrait hole.

He left the common room and started dragging his feet to anywhere his feet could bring him to.

Harry pondered on what just happened... didn’t Professor Raptor assure him that the book would have original concepts for their mythology? Was there a mistake in the book? Or was the professor making some kind of joke?

He didn’t know where he was going but he bumped into someone wearing a black cloak... it was an elder.

“Sorry, my son,” said the elder apologetically, brushing his black robes.

“No, I’m sorry, sir,” Harry apologized distractedly, “I wasn’t paying attention to where I was going....”

"I see," said the elder, nodding thoughtfully. "Well, let bygones be bygones but may I ask... would you mind to tell me where the stairs are? I seem to have lost my way."

Harry pointed down the hallway to the left. The elder thanked Harry and left.

He was quite alone for a moment and continued his brooding trek down the hallway, ignoring Peeves blowing a raspberry at him as he went. Harry thought about visiting the library or go see Hagrid.

"Argh!" Harry groaned as he banged his fist on the wall, a few floors later. "What made it all wrong!? Hermione and I were like this!" he twisted his forefinger and middle finger, "...and now..." he sighed and leaned his back against the wall, raking his jet-black hair, "Now what am I gonna do?"

The Boy Who Lived raked his hair once more and traversed to the Great Hall, thinking that it was best to eat dinner to ease his sorrows. He didn't quite take notice how menacingly purple the clouds were and how strong the gusts of winds pushed the trees down at the Forbidden Forest.

- - -

Rapticon Sr. looked out window with utmost interest.

"Funny, the winds are heading east when it's supposed to be in west minutes ago!" he said in awe. One could think he was senile.

At that moment, the door opened in a quick bash. Rapticon Sr., using his raptor reflexes, turned and aimed his pistol, which he drew from his desk, at the elder who was now standing at the threshold, his walking staff within his grasp.

"Aim a gun at an old friend?" the elder asked humorously.

"Oh, Accula," said Rapticon Sr. in amazement. "What are you doing here and how did you get here so fast?"

“Apparition,” said Accula.

“Apparition?” said Rapticon Sr., lowering his gun. “I thought Hogwarts —”

“I’m an Oracle, Dimitri,” said Accula wryly. “Wizards and Oracles are far from same, have I already told you that?”

“Forgot about that,” said Rapticon Sr., “All strange shenanigans aside... what’s going on?”

Accula sighed.

“The book.”

“What?” asked Rapticon Sr.

“The book, the one I sent you! F.F.O.!” Accula said loudly.

“What about it?” Rapticon Sr. asked in tones of all seriousness.

“Sit down...” Accula said “I’ll explain.”

Rapticon Sr. sat behind his desk and using his wand, he conjured a chintz chair out of thin air.

“Sit down, Accula,” he gestured to the chair.

Accula sat down on the chair and cleared his throat.

“You are completely aware that I made two versions of F.F.O, right?”

Rapticon Sr. nodded, listening in.

“Good. Well, if you listen to me, I will tell you everything about the other version I made... not the one you saw and read... the other one I kept hidden from you for all this time.”

“After all this time?” said Rapticon Sr.

“Always,”

- - -

Hermione looked at Ron to check out if he’s doing okay. Everyone was down for dinner while she and Ron were doing their mythology project. The task of completing a bestiary wasn’t a walk in the park, Hermione thought. It would’ve been better if they had more help... Hermione sighed.

She wished she didn’t blow up at Harry. For all she knew, he was probably telling the truth about the book but there were times Harry can be so naïve.

“Done!” said Ron with a gleam of triumph. “I drew my first original mythological creature!” he held the parchment up to Hermione.

Being a good drawer in her Muggle school, Hermione was impressed at the way Ron drew the monster... it was a cross between a dragon and a hippogriff.

“That’s great, Ron!” Hermione said, taking the parchment and laying it on the table surface. “I never knew you had talent in drawing.”

“Thanks,” said Ron, swelling in pride. “I never knew it myself, really.”

“Keep it up then!” said Hermione as she started writing down notes on fictional heroes, gods and goddesses.

“The wind is really strong, isn’t?” Ron commented on the sound of winds outside.

Hermione looked out and saw the purplish sky outside... it looked unusual.

“You’re right,” Hermione said, she looked distantly and sighed. “Ron?”

“Yeah?”

“You don’t think...” she stared into space and sighed, “You don’t think I was too harsh to Harry awhile ago, do you?”

“Er,” Ron winced, “To be frank, you were too harsh – don’t get angry at me!”

Hermione chuckled, “I won’t, Ron,” she then frowned at her parchment paper which had a paragraph about a story of two witches who loathed each other. “I mean, it’s not just that... I’m afraid... well, that Harry and I might – er – have a fallout soon –”

“Don’t say that,” said Ron sadly, dropping his quill to look at Hermione. “You and Harry have known each other for years now... I doubt you two will sever ties just because of a project.”

“I know but,” Hermione groaned and scratched her head. “I’m afraid... that’s all.... Well, hours ago... Harry and I shared a reconciliation moment... and,” she turned to Ron, her saddened face was apparent, “I really liked it.”

“What did you do?”

“We hugged...” Hermione then slowly smiled. “I didn’t know why but I realized how much he means to me... I can’t lose him, Ron... I just can’t.”

“Hey,” said Ron, putting his arm around her, “You’re not going to lose Harry. It’s just a project, right? You two can make up after you two cool off. So don’t worry about it, alright?”

Hermione stared down at her parchment and sniffed. Why were her eyes watering?

“You don’t have to cry, Hermione,” said Ron, smirking at her.

“I’m not crying,” said Hermione quietly. “I – I just realized that I’m stupid for not being sympathetic towards him... I feel terrible.”

Ron cleared his throat.

“Harry is probably feeling as terrible as you,” said Ron.

“You think so?” she turned to him.

“Well, one time,” said Ron, rubbing his chin. “After you argued with him two weeks ago, I found him – er – looking a bit beside himself at the lake... he kind of – er – told me that you’re the most important girl in his life and he’d feel terrible if he ever lose a person like you... I can’t say I think differently. He’s right, you know.”

Hermione couldn’t take it anymore. A tear trickled down her face. She quickly brushed it before Ron could notice.

“I – Is that all he said?” Hermione asked.

“Yeah,” said Ron, “But hey, Hermione,” he held her shoulder. “If you lose Harry... you can’t say you’ll lose him forever. He’ll be there and I’ll be there... no matter what happens. Like every mistake, it can be removed... that’s why pencils have erasers!”

Hermione giggled. She looked at Ron and knew he was right... Harry will always be there... always. No matter what happens.

“You’re the best, Ron,” said Hermione, reaching for his hand to squeeze it.

“Hey, no problem. What are friends for, eh?” said Ron, glancing at the purplish clouds outside. “Look, let’s go down to dinner and take a break, alright?”

Hermione was about to answer when something bright and gradual caught her eye; the book that Harry brought to them earlier was lying at another table nearby, away from their workplace. It looked untouched and lifeless but she could’ve sworn the pages glowed.

“Hermione?” Ron asked, following her gaze “What is it?”

Hermione shook her head.

“Nothing... I thought I saw something –”

Then it happened again! The book made a corporeal glow! The pages were glowing around the sides as if someone placed a strong light source inside it. One could think that it was a lamp.

“Ron!” Hermione whispered cautiously, pointing to the book “Look!”

Ron turned and saw the book glowing a tinge gold. He stood up quickly and stepped back.

“What’s that?” he asked urgently, pointing at it.

“I - I don’t know...” said Hermione, observing the book with dread and foreboding. “Erm... reckon we open it?” she asked, the idea of her question sounded both stupid and premature.

“Go figure,” said Ron, chuckling nervously as he stared at the glowing book, its glow winking in and out of sight gradually.

- - -

“Are you telling me that the book you sent me leads one to another –”

“– world plane” Accula finished Rapticon Sr.’s sentence, “A new overworld!”

“Hold on, hold on!” Rapticon Sr. said, alarmed. “So whoever opens this book will be met with a thousand brick-crapping sessions for life? I mean, if they do open it... they’ll be meeting something beyond absurdity?”

“That is assumable,” said Accula as he stood up. “Now quick, get me the book... give it to me so I can exchange it with this copy,” he took out the blue leather-bound book that he intended to give from his robe pockets. “This is the other unmagicked version I was supposed to give.”

“Er – the book?” Rapticon Sr. said nervously, “I can tell you that the book that could potentially flame a thousand lives is in the hands of Harry Potter, the friend I mentioned in my last missive –”

“What?!” Accula exclaimed over the strong gust outside. “The book is in the hands of a student?!”

“The student I mentioned, yes,” said Rapticon Sr.

“This changes everything!” he said, turning to his staff. “Quick, we must accelerate our pace. That book must be retrieved before he opens it!” he turned to Rapticon Sr. “What does this Potter boy looks like?”

“Jet-black hair, knobby knees, green eyes, glasses... what the book says.” said Rapticon Sr.

“Let’s go... I think I bumped into a boy with your descriptions awhile ago,” said Accula, approaching towards the door and held the door’s handle. “I think it’s best if you bring Stalingrad.”

Without questioning Accula, Rapticon Sr. walked to the fireplace and looked up over the mantelpiece; perched on top hung a saber with a golden handle and a silver blade that had word carvings that said “Stalingrad”.

Rapticon Sr. grabbed the sword by the handle and took a sheath from the side of the fireplace and slid the sword into the leather-made sheath.

“What are we expecting?” Rapticon Sr. asked as he went for his desk to pick up another pistol.

“I’m not sure,” said Accula, looking through the windows, observing the violently swaying trees. “But if the book is ever opened... I can tell that bad things will be heading this way.”

“Ya think, Accula? Rapticon Sr. cocked an eyebrow upward.

“Ready?” Accula looked at Rapticon Sr., ignoring the raptor’s last words.

Rapticon Sr. went for his brown coat and wore it. He looked at Accula and smirked.

“If we’re done with this, Zaccheus, I implore you that you accept my claim that you’ll owe me supper.”

- - -

Hermione and Ron walked slowly towards the book, its constant and gradual glowing flooding their faces with light.

“Go and open it,” Ron whispered.

Hermione gulped and nodded.

“Okay but if anything happens to me, reel me in, alright?” she said.

“Alright,” said Ron, nodding.

Hermione moved closer and felt the books leather cover with her hand... it was as warm as warm water.

“Well?” Ron said from behind.

Hermione didn’t know why but by her touch of the tome, she felt a jolting sensation around her neck that traveled to her chest then down to her toes.

Then it happened.

Beneath her palms, Hermione felt the book throb... as if it had a heartbeat.

A heartbeat?

The beating sent chills down Hermione’s spine that she didn’t know what she would do. For some reason, she didn’t care for what was happening in their homework... she just looked at the book with longing... wanting.

“Grangeré..”.

Hermione’s eyes widened. She heard a whisper!The whisper was audible and clear as crystal; why hasn’t Ron reacted to it? He was quite silent....

“D-did you hear t-that, Ron?” Hermione turned to the redhead, her hands still on the book’s cover.

“H-hear what?” Ron asked.

“That!” Hermione said, gesturing her head to the book. “I – I think I heard it speak!”

“Through the gates thy soul’s been laden...”

“There!” Hermione squealed.

“I don’t hear anything, Hermione!” said Ron, fearfully, “I – I think we s-shouldn’t touch the book, H-Hermione... it looks like bad news –”

Ron paused when the fireplace extinguished itself. All candles, light sources went out in an instant. The two were alone in the dark where the light only came from the glowing book and the dark purple blanket of light that enveloped the floors near the windows. The room was dead silent sans the roaring of the winds beyond the walls of the common room.

“H-Hermione?” said Ron in a dead and fearful whisper, gazing at the darkness.

Hermione did not answer.

“Hermione?” Ron called, loudly this time. “Answer me!”

Her back was facing him but it was quite unmoving. He could tell it was her due to the book’s light forming a dark figure of Hermione as she was against the light.

“Oh, my Merlin...” Ron groaned as he rounded around Hermione.

“Hermione, I think we should go to the Great Hall – Hermione?!”

Ron jumped back, Hermione’s eyes looked haunting and empty. Her brown eyes stared at Ron’s blue ones, Ron felt a chill down his spine when he heard a voice.

“The tide is rising... death will be upon many...”

“O-oh, Merlin - !” Ron gasped, feeling afraid beyond his wits. “Hermione, can you hear me?!”

Hermione stared from Ron then to the book. She did not hear him, the little thing within her thought. No one could hear her... it just happened. The brightest witch of Hogwarts, looked at the book with concentration that she placed her two hands at each side; the book’s glow was more apparent than ever, lighting the dark corners of the common room.

She looked at the book, and then to Ron with the same cold, empty stare that wasn’t hers.

“H-Hermione?” Ron whimpered.

“I must open it, Ron,” she said in a hollow voice. “I have to....”

“D-don’t,” Ron shook his head, feeling fearful. “P-please, Hermione... don’t....”

Without hesitating, Hermione held the edge of the cover, poised to open it.

Ron couldn’t contain himself.

“Hermione, NO - !”

It was too late.

- - -

The Great Hall's rafters shook violently, Harry dropped his knife and fork and looked up.

"– Did you hear that?" asked Parvati to Harry's right.

"– I think I heard a booming sound –" said Ernie McMillian from afar.

"– You don't think it's him, do you?" asked a small Gryffindor first year.

"– What was that?" asked Malfoy cautiously, looking up at the purplish sky of the enchanted ceiling. It was hauntingly dark up there and Harry thought it looked strange for it to twirl like that.

"D-did you hear that, Harry?" Neville asked nervously, over his lamb chops.

Harry looked around the murmuring and fearful crowd of students. Harry looked at the staff table; all the teachers were on their feet, looking fearful and alert. Dumbledore had his wand out and he was pointing at the sky, his lips moving as if he was speaking in an incantation. The Heads of Houses moved to their tables to calm the students down.

McGonagall moved forward to the Gryffindor table, she was near Harry enough for him to hear her talk clearly.

"Stay in your seats, all of you!" she said sternly. She then turned to Snape, who had been walking down the same aisle. "What do you think?"

"I doubt it's the Dark Lord," muttered Snape, staring at the open doors of the Great Hall where the dark entrance hall spread beyond.

Harry then heard another distant booming sound. The murmuring students silenced as everyone looked up at the purplish clouds. Harry could see the clouds flash lightning above. Turning back to the crowd, the Heads of Houses were now looking around, cautiously, their wands out. Sprout turned to McGonagall, who turned to Snape who, in turn, turned to the Great Hall doors.

Another booming sound... it was getting louder.

The silence was broken when Argus Filch, the caretaker, entered the Great Hall, looking alert. It became apparent that he just came from his office; he looked confused at the dead silence of the Great Hall.

Harry rounded his head back to the staff table; Dumbledore was now pointing his wand, muttering incantations as he did. Strangely, Professor Raptor wasn't there in his seat....

Where could he be?

"Minerva, Severus, Promona, Filius," called Dumbledore. The Heads of Houses approached to him then engaged in a whispered conversation.

"What do you think it is?" Seamus asked around his seatmates.

"Y-you don't think it's You-Know-Who?" asked Lavender, holding onto Parvati.

"I don't think it is," Harry assured, feeling his scar. It wasn't burning or anything.

"Well," said Dean, "As long as it isn't serious, I doubt —"

The air exploded.

BOOM!

BOOM!!

BOOM!!!

Everyone screamed at the booming sounds which shook the Great Hall. The earth shook and Harry fell backwards stalwartly as he saw students jump over him, rushing towards the exit of the Great Hall.

“What’s happening?!” yelled Neville in a panicky voice, turning left and right, getting bumped by the throng of students rushing out to the door.

“NO ONE LEAVES THE GREAT HALL!” yelled McGonagall, firing a gunshot from her wand. “Professor Dumbledore has enchanted the Great Hall for your protection!”

“They are not protected, Minerva!” called a voice from the Great Hall entrance.

Every head turned to see Professor Raptor standing by the threshold, wearing a brown trench coat. Harry could see a sheathed beneath his brown coat. To everyone’s surprised, he had a black cloaked companion whom Harry recognized as the same person he bumped into earlier. He finally registered the elder’s appearance.

He looked almost identical to Professor Raptor save for the shorter snout and the bluish saturation of his head. Unlike the other, the elder’s eyes were electric yellow but the slits remained black as ebony.

“What do you mean, Dimitri?” asked McGonagall over the heads of students.

“There’s been a compromise in this school!” said Professor Raptor, walking down the center aisle. “And I desperately plead that you all leave to the school grounds – it’s the only safe way –”

“Preposterous,” said Snape, stepping forward. “No such force than an explosion can penetrate the enchantments of this hall. Let alone that Professor Dumbledore cast them!”

“You don’t understand!” said Rapticon Sr., and then turned to the Gryffindor table. “Where’s Harry?”

All eyes fell on Harry.... What did Professor Raptor want from him?

“Dimitri,” said Dumbledore calmly, “May I ask the pleasure to tell me what is going on?”

“I will Albus,” said Rapticon Sr., walking up to the staff table. “I will – I just need to talk to Harry and that –”

BOOM!!

BOOM!!

A loud ear-splitting boom echoed across the Great Hall. The earth shook violently than before that the walls began to crack. The students clung themselves to the tables as Harry went into action and jumped from table to table and hopped down to the platform where the staff table was. All teachers were now holding onto the tables, gaining balance.

Then in a sudden flash of lightning, as Harry felt his feet touch the ground, he saw purple, black and green lights flash at the center of the Great Hall.

“Albus!” Rapticon Sr. turned to Dumbledore, who stood up straight. “I need you to leave now!”

“Professor!!” Harry yelled, looking at the gateway of purple, black and green grow larger, hovering above the hall.

“Harry!” Rapticon Sr. jumped to Harry’s side. “Where’s the book?! The one I gave to you?”

“The book?!” Harry said, keeping his ground as a large quake came to, “It’s not with me!”

“What?!” Rapticon Sr. shouted over the large booming sounds above. “Where is it then?!”

“Quick, Albus,” said McGonagall as she, Dumbledore and Snape walked across the hall, edging away from the portal that grew larger.

“It’s with Hermione and Ron but I think they are at the common room!” Harry pointed up, “At the seventh floor!”

“Dammit!” Rapticon Sr. swore, taking out a long saber. “We must go there! I think I know the source of this ruckus!”

“AAHHHH!!” screamed the voice of Lavender Brown, pointing above.

Everyone turned to the portal; at least twelve large flames fell from it. The whole hall screamed as the flames landed on the tables, breaking them.

“Oh no!” the elder said, “The fiends have been unleashed!”

“Accula!” Rapticon Sr. yelled to the elder.

The elder nodded to Rapticon Sr., turned to the panicked throng and clapped his hands to his staff. Harry then felt a gush of wind nearly knock him off his feet but was able to register the flying tables and chairs that flew to the sides of the hall giving a large clearing across the Great Hall.

Another scream.

Harry and Rapticon Sr. turned to see the flames that engulfed the ground grew into impish-like creatures. They were green, wore red hats and shorts. Each of them carried a long rusty knife. They screeched at the escaping crowd in a high pitch scream.

“Goblins!” gasped the elder named Accula.

Before Harry could pull out his wand to stun a goblin from rushing to the crowd who choked the entrance of the Great Hall, a red spark flew past over his head and knocked it cleanly on the back.

“Minerva,” said Dumbledore, putting down his wand, “Hasten to help the prefects bring the students to the school grounds and then to Hogsmeade – Severus, come with me!”

“Harry!” Rapticon Sr. pulled Harry by the wrist. “We have to go to the Gryffindor common room!”

Harry nodded quickly.

“Good,” said Rapticon Sr., turning to Accula, “Quick, Zaccheus! This way!”

Harry, with Rapticon Sr. and Accula behind, sprinted across the Great Hall but was interjected by three goblins. The three stopped on their tracks as Harry registered Snape and Dumbledore stunning goblins at the end of the Great Hall.

“So this is what you made inside that damn book, Accula?” Rapticon Sr. said, going into battle stance. He turned to Harry, “This is the part where you use what I and the last Defense Against the Dark Arts teachers taught you, Harry!”

“Got it,” Harry answered, looking at the creatures.

“Good! Commencing battle sequence, now!” Rapticon Sr. shouted as he ran and uppercut a goblin to the air with his blade.

“I hope my magic is still good,” Accula said as green sparkles surrounded him, “Thundara!!” he chanted.

In amazement to all who were left in the Great Hall, a bolt of lightning came from the sky and damaged the second goblin to death.

“Harry! Take the last one!” Rapticon Sr. shouted, turning to Harry.

As if he was scrolling down a menu of magic spells with a white gloved hand, Harry thought of the first one he could think of.

“Stupefy!”

The jet of red sparks came shooting out of his wand, knocking the goblin. Harry found it surprising that his Stunning Charm didn’t knock the goblin out. The goblin screeched at Harry as it jumped to him, grazing Harry’s shoulder with its knife.

“Argh!” Harry groaned, holding his bleeding shoulder as the goblin somersaulted back to its previous position.

“Harry!” Rapticon Sr. shouted, kneeling before him. “Accula! Magic the lights out of that imp!”

Harry looked up at his professor and said, “I – I’m alright, sir....”

“Don’t worry, Harry, it will be okay,” he said as he took out his kerchief and tied it around Harry’s wound. “That will hold in the bleeding until we get Madam Pomfrey to heal you later.”

Harry nodded and stood up. He was able to catch Accula casting a ball of fire at the goblin before it shriveled grotesquely into nothingness.

“The road is clear, let’s go!” Accula affirmed.

“Potter!” Snape yelled as he zapped a goblin to oblivion. “Where do you think you’re going?!”

“He’s with me, Severus!” said Rapticon Sr., taking Harry by the shoulder as they passed under the portal which shrunk to nothingness.

“Dimitri – !” Severus was cut short when three goblins jumped in front of him. “Sectumsemptra!”

All three goblins were severed severely as their halves flailed on the floor in pools of blood. Harry nearly barfed at this image but was reeled in by Professor Raptor who led him out of the Great Hall.

“B-but what about Professor Dumbledore?!” Harry yelled as the booming sounds became apparent.

“There’s nothing Albus can’t handle,” said Rapticon Sr. as he led Harry and Accula up the marble staircase to a hallway where the ground quaked fiercely. To their sides, the portraits shook while their subjects held onto the frames, yelling curses, asking Harry as he passed by, “What in Merlin’s beard is going on?!”

Another quake and Harry fell as he held on to a suit of armor and saw it was about to crash on him. Harry dodged it before it could crash down on him.

“Be careful!” said Rapticon Sr., dodging falling debris. “Dammit!”

After gaining ground, Harry and Rapticon Sr. followed Accula, who was ahead of them in the hallway, towards the next set of staircases.

“Are we going to encounter more of those goblins?” Harry asked Rapticon Sr. as they reached the second landing.

“Definitely,” said Rapticon Sr., “Whoa!”

A portal at the end of the corridor they were at exuded four goblins. One of them shrieked at them, approaching as they went.

“Harry,” said Rapticon Sr., turning to Harry, “You go ahead to the common room. If you meet up with any fiend – those monsters – just hex ‘em, alright? And if needed, use an Unforgivable Curse!”

“But –”

“I’ll be fine!” said Rapticon Sr., jerking his head at Accula, who was in a battle position. “I got Accula with me! Now go!”

Harry did not hesitate any further, he clambered up the stairs and nearly fell back a step when a flashes red, blue and white sparkled below the floor Professor Raptor and Accula was. Assuring himself that Professor Raptor was okay, Harry climbed up the marble staircase, avoiding falling debris as he climbed. He finally reached the fifth floor corridor when he saw a bright room at the end.

Going through the doors, Harry was met with a high and wide room known as the Grand Staircase where more than hundreds of portraits dominated the walls and moving stairs come and go as it pleased. If it had been a peaceful moment, the portraits would’ve move on about their ways serenely but tonight, there was chaos. Every resident in their portraits ran, screamed and fled to other portraits as their frames fell from where it hung.

“Whoa!” Harry gasped, as he sidestepped away from a falling part of the ceiling. The ground was shaking greatly now. He caught a glimpse of a thunderstorm from one of the many windows that littered the walls of the Grand Staircase.

“Run!” shouted a prefect, two floors below, to a group of first year Hufflepuffs. Harry deducted that they were students who finished dinner early.

BOOM!

Another booming sound and Harry felt the platform he was on crack. He looked below and saw a forked line form below his feet. He looked up at the first staircase and ran up for it bringing himself to the fifth landing as far as he knew.

“Potter!” shouted a voice behind him. Harry looked below and saw Professor McGonagall looking up in horror.

“What are you doing here!?” she shouted over the noise. “This place is dangerous! I want you to go the school grounds this instant! The teachers will handle evacuations for the others! Go – ARGH!!”

“PROFESSOR!!” Harry yelled, thrusting himself to lean over the platform railing.

A large boulder, as big as three heads, was falling pell-mell towards McGonagall. Harry pulled out his wand.

“Reducto!”

His spell took a large chunk out of the boulder but it failed to destroy it completely.

“Look out!” Harry yelled.

McGonagall aimed her wand at the boulder until –

SLASH!

The boulder was cut into two. The split ends fell awkwardly beside McGonagall as she turned to see her savior.

“Dimitri!” shrieked McGonagall. “You saved my life!”

“Not now, Minerva!” said Rapticon Sr., walking towards her, “First and foremost, you’ve got to get out of here! I’ll take care of everything!”

“Professor!” Harry called from above.

“Harry!” Rapticon Sr. waved his sword at Harry. Accula appeared through an archway nearby where Rapticon Sr. entered. “You wait up there! I’ll get ya” he turned to McGonagall, “Minerva, go!”

She didn’t hesitate any longer but took his word for it; she turned on her heel and left through the archway. Coincidentally, the archway caved in, choking another way to the other side.

Rapticon Sr. and Accula found their way towards Harry by going up a set of stairs that led to a platform that connected.

“Any progress?” Rapticon Sr. panted as they met at the center.

“They’re up there,” Harry pointed to a floor above.

“Lead the way, boy!” said Accula.

Nodding to the elder, Harry raced to a standing staircase, luckily avoiding it crumble as they stepped on the sixth landing. To their right was a platform bridge that crossed the room to a hallway that led to the Fat Lady’s portrait.

“Wait!” Rapticon Sr. said, pointing to the right of the bridge.

Four goblins came climbing from the edge. They blocked their path, flailing their knives at them.

“You know what to do!” Accula shouted, “Flare!”

Harry shielded his eyes as a ball of fire and hot gas burned the three goblins away, their bodies falling towards the floors below. Harry winced when he saw one of them land on their head making a sickening crush.

“Bastards!” Rapticon Sr. yelled as he gave the last unlucky goblin an uppercut with his sword sending it to oblivion.

“Wow,” Harry said in amazement, “What was that?”

“Climhazzard. I learned it from a friend,” said Rapticon Sr., “C’mon!”

They crossed the bridge, only jumping out of it as a chunk of debris fell on it, cutting their path back.

“How are we going to go back?” Harry asked, as he straightened himself up.

“We worry about that later!” said Accula, pointing his staff at the archway that led to the seventh floor corridor.

The party ran across the darkening corridor; their only light source came from the purple tinge the windows cast that emitted from the skies outside. Harry nearly stumbled at some lone rocks and trotted on to overtake Rapticon Sr. and Accula.

“Yellow bird” Harry yelled the password as he stopped before the portrait of the Fat Lady but he realized she wasn’t there at all. She must’ve fled.

“To hell with that!” said Rapticon Sr., slashing the portrait open

The three climbed in and before Harry’s eyes was the common room in pure destruction. Everything in it was upturned, broken and ripped. The red curtains that hung above were ripped as if someone pulled them severely. The biggest damage was the large hole at the wall and the missing chunk at the ceiling. A roaring wind whipped his hair violently that he squinted against it.

“HARRY!”

Harry turned to see Ron at the corner.

“Ron!” Harry shouted, running to him, “Where’s Hermione?!”

“Sh-she... she-she...” Ron stuttered.

“What?!” Harry yelled, “Where is she?”

“She disappeared!” Ron shouted.

“What!?” Rapticon Sr. said in shock.

“She opened the book and –” Ron stuttered, standing on his feet. “- all this light came flashing around and some creatures came out – we fought them off but then something huge caused the common room to have that hole!”

He pointed towards the gap at the end of the common room.

“She didn’t fall, did she?” Harry said, dreading the results.

Ron didn’t say anything but he was whimpering, unsure of himself.

“SHE DIDN’T FALL, DID SHE?!” Harry yelled, shaking Ron by the shoulders.

Ron was about to answer when they heard a roaring sound.

“We have company,” Rapticon Sr. as unsheathed his sword.

Harry looked out the gap and the most horrific thing came into view...

“What in God’s name is that?” Rapticon Sr. said, looking at the fiend that emerged from the whole.

The colossal giant was color purple. It had red horns and a face of a dog crossed with a lion. Its Mohawk-like hair and muscular body gave Harry the impression it was some biker creature. Its spikes on its back gave an evil look against the purple sky that flooded that broken

common room. The creature gave a loud roar shaking the whole place.

“What in God’s name is that?” Rapticon Sr. repeated to Accula.

“That, my friend, is a Behemoth... a large creature that uses thunder magic and pure strength. Be careful. It can’t define friend from foe,” Accula said, going into a battle stance.

The beast saw the four living creatures. It gave another mighty roar and pulled the common room walls apart, forcing the hole to get larger than before.

“Prepare yourselves!” Rapticon Sr. shouted.

Harry didn’t know why but he rushed into the battle scene and started thinking of any magic spell he can use against the Behemoth.

“Back into the pits that spawned you!” Accula said, “Flare!”

Like before, a ball of fire and hot gas ignited at the face of the Behemoth making it wail in pain. The Behemoth then swung its claws at them. Everyone jumped back to avoid the purple claw slashing right at them.

“Argh!” Rapticon Sr. ran towards the creature and slashed the beast’s arms.

“Stupefy!” Harry shouted shooting the spell to the Behemoth’s eyes. This caused the beast to flail its arms around at them.

“Harry, watch out!” Accula shouted and cast a barrier around Harry making the arms of the Behemoth bounce away with such an incredible force. On impact, Harry could see hexagonal shapes materialize before him.

“Good job, Harry! We have the advantage!” Rapticon Sr. cheered, drawing two pistols from his holsters and started shooting the beast’s face. It didn’t do that much damage as the beast roared louder, shielding its face with its arms.

“Ah! No use!” Rapticon Sr. holstered the pistols away, quickly drawing his sword.

“The only way to defeat this is to do heavy damage!” Accula said, “Thundaga!”

It was almost a sight to behold. From the sky, a beam of light came striking down the beast, transforming into large bolts of lightning giving it a grand effect.

“Nice!” Rapticon Sr. cheered on, his jaw dropping in awe.

“ROAR!!!!” the Behemoth yelled at them in pain. The monster turned its head lazily and raised its head up at the sky.

“Uh oh,” Rapticon Sr. gasped.

Harry looked up saw something huge coming down from the sky.

“It’s coup de grace!!” Accula shouted running backwards, “METEOR!!”

“OH, MY GOD!” Harry and Rapticon Sr. shouted in unison.

Harry saw the Behemoth fall backwards to the ground. Harry assumed it fell for dead... but there was more to worry about.

“Harry, run for cover!” Ron shouted behind him.

Harry ran back towards Ron but before he could reach the outstretched hand of Ron, something happened.

- - -

It was like another apparition. Rapticon Sr. saw the F.F.O. book light up.

“What the - ?!” Rapticon Sr. gasped.

Then words spoke to him like a whisper....

“The one to prevail the world has been found.”

“What?!” Accula asked from his side, assuring Rapticon Sr. that he wasn’t the only who heard this ominous voice.

“Let the crystals lead the one towards redemption and light...”

“Huh?!” Ron wondered looking around.

“And then the Guardians shall liberate the abandoned...”

“You heard that?!” Harry yelled across the roaring winds.

Then there was a pause....

Harry then realized time has stopped. Sans for his companions, everything was frozen in time, the meteor, the trees, everything....

Suddenly, the book, F.F.O., opened and a flash of blinding white light obscured Rapticon Sr.’s vision.

“Argh!” Harry’s voice from afar shouted.

“AHHH!!!” Ron screamed from Rapticon Sr.’s left.

“NO!” Accula shouted from Rapticon Sr.’s right.

Then in a jolting sensation, something grabbed Rapticon Sr. out of sight. He felt like he was in a whirlwind of light, color and flame.

“AAAAHHH!!!” The four screamed in unison.

Like a vacuum, Rapticon Sr. and the three felt like they were being sucked into a tornado... a tornado that brought them into endless darkness...

- - -

Two hours has passed and the school has been repaired to its former glory thanks to advance magic made by the teachers. The students have been safely protected from the fiends that attacked the school.

Until now, no one was aware that a large Behemoth attacked the school.

"Is the Gryffindor common room fixed?" McGonagall asked Flitwick and Sprout.

"Everything seems to be in order," said tiny professor Flitwick.

"The House can go back to their quarters again," Sprout said, nodding McGonagall as she and Flitwick walked down the corridor and out to the Grand Staircase.

McGonagall went inside the common room and saw it was fixed like last. The large hole was gone and it looked as if nothing has happened.

But what caught her eye was a book with torn pages around it... it was a blue leather-bound book with peelings on the title. McGonagall couldn't make any of it.

"What on earth?" she said as she pointed her wand, "Reparo!"

In an instant, the book repaired itself as the pages slipped inside the leather cover as if it was being vacuumed.

Once repaired, she picked the tome up and observed it with curiosity. The lock that held the book closed once hung inattentively at the side. Out of curiosity, McGonagall turned the lock away, opened the book and looked into the first page.

It was all blank. The Transfiguration professor dismissed this as a blank book and placed it on the table surface before she left the common room....

The dark blue skies of the night whispered a nameless song of the wind as it flowed across the trees down at the Forbidden Forest. Owls

hooted quietly after settling in their beloved Owlery once more, feeling a sense of relaxation throughout the night. The wind traveled across the dark Hogwarts grounds and into the window that stood ajar in the Gryffindor common room.

Out of the odds of it, the wind, as if it wanted to, flipped the leather blue cover of the tome slowly, revealing the blank page where words formed in dry ink on the yellowish parchment:

“Final Fantasy Overworld”

Thus, the adventure of a lifetime begins.

Chapter Two

Kweh And Kupo

The world has moved on.

“Ugh,” Harry groaned.

How long have I been asleep? My back hurts... ouch....

Harry's back ached. He shifted on his position and discovered that he was on his face on the ground, his nose pressed against the solid earth. The scent of dirt crept up his nostrils as a gentle breeze traveled across his painful back. His ears were throbbing madly but he could perfectly hear the sounds of trees rustling with the wind that carried at a distance.

Feeling that his back is less painful, Harry turned on his back and opened his eyes to be blinded by the glare of clear blue sky; the sun shone to his upper right showing that it was pass noon.

The world has moved on.

“Where am I?” Harry said, squinting at the near cloudless sky. It was colored in endless blue... Harry has never seen a sky so nice....

It finally occurred to him that he wasn't wearing any glasses. The spot of clouds above him were blurry and he couldn't see if there was a bird flying above him. Harry liked the fact that the temperature was a mixture of cool and warmth. The wind whipped his bangs gently....

The world has moved on.

Harry turned on all fours and looked up at the distance. He could see nothing but a murky image of green, blue, tinges of brown and bits of white. He reached for the ground and started feeling for his spectacles. As he felt the solid figure that turned out to be his glasses, he realized that he didn't know where he was. He could tell that he was in a whole different area. It wasn't Hogwarts or anyplace familiar to him.

He put on his spectacles and was met with a sight too amazing to behold. He was at the center of a dirt road that stretched beyond evergreen fields that rippled at the reflection of the sunlight above, the wind going through it as they did. The dirt road elongated down below the hill Harry was on, stretching beyond, curving left and right like a brown snake. To his sides, Harry could see patches of forests that littered at the distance; the trees rustled with the winds like a dance of nature. It was beautiful.

Harry turned his attention to the dirt road that led to the expanse beyond. His eyes finally rested at what seemed to be a settlement on a hill far away from his position. The settlement looked small, not more than four structures, Harry thought.

Indeed, the world has moved on.

Harry was about to get to his feet but a strong force landed on the back of his head and slammed his face to ground making him swallow some dust.

“Mmmhm!” Harry mumbled whilst his face was on the earth. The weight on the back of his head lifted making him pull his head up.

“Kweh!”

Kweh?

Rubbing the back of his head, his eyes watering, Harry turned his head on the side and winced. What was that? Finally reaching for his glasses again, he placed them on the bridge of his nose, lifted himself on his hands and looked beyond.

Running on its tall chicken-like legs, a yellow bird as large as an ostrich was gliding down the pathway before him. The bird had feathers of color yellow – glowing by the sun’s sunlight as it ran – its long neck stood straight with pride while its long tail of feathers pointed upwards, pleasantly waving back at Harry like a peacock tail. It looked like a large yellow chicken, Harry thought.. Its beak was too big for a chicken but indeed, it looked like a large chicken.

“Kweh! Cue! Wark!” the yellow bird screeched as it ran down the pathway, waving its feathers happily.

Harry fixed his glasses on the bridge of his nose and stood up. He cleaned the dust off him and was about to check his pocket for his wand when a voice shouted behind him.

“Hey, Choco! Come back here, kupo!”

Turning his head behind him, he saw another peculiar creature. Running (or hopping) on its two legs was a little creature that Harry has never seen before. It was tan (or white, Harry couldn’t tell), its rabbit like ears was flying behind it while the creature ran with its purple bat-like wings fluttered behind him. Harry also noted the strange red ball that bounced above the creature which was connected to an antenna on its head. The creature’s eyes were small and blue and it wore a green long sleeved t-shirt. Its nose was brown and the creature’s size looked like that of a house-elf.

“Choco, don’t go, kupo!” the little thing ran past Harry and stopped before him, panting tiredly.

“E-excuse me,” Harry finally said, trying to communicate with it, relieved that it could speak English.

“Huh?” the creature said, turning its little head to Harry, “Kupo!” it cried, jumping. “Oh, a hume – Sorry! For a second there, I thought you were a fiend, kupo!”

Harry moved forward and squatted before it.

“Er – I don’t mean to be rude or anything but... what are you?”

Harry had to admit, the creature looked cute and fluffy up-close.

“You haven’t seen a Moogle, kupo?” the creature called a Moogle asked surprisingly.

“A mo – what?” Harry asked, taking a double take on what the creature said.

“A moogle, kupo!” the moogle said, jumping on its tiny feet. “Don’t you see the red bonbon on my head?” he pointed on the red ball that dangled on the end of the antenna, “Or my purple wings?” he pulled his purple wings from his back, “Um... did you hit your head or something?”

Harry stood in full height and scratched the back of his head. The Moogle looked up at him.

“Er... your bird –” he pointed at the yellow bird at the distance, “- kind of hit me on the head with its feet.”

The Moogle turned to the yellow bird which was grazing on a tiny shrub of yellow and green.

“Oh, sorry,” said the Moogle, turning back to Harry, “Choco can be a bit excited at times, kupo.”

“Choco?” said Harry, looking at the bird the Moogle called Choco, “What is that thing, anyway? A chicken?”

In an instant, the Moogle shot up to the air, fluttering his wings. He flew up to the point where he was in level with Harry’s eyes.

“Geez, you really need to see a White Mage, kupo!” he exclaimed. “Choco must’ve hit you really hard, kupo!” he started fluttering around Harry. It was like watching a really fast mobile light, “For your sake, Choco is a Chocobo.”

“Chocobo?” Harry asked in awe as he turned to the Chocobo that was running in circles around the green pastures.

The Moogle sighed.

“A Chocobo is a bird that can be used for transportation, trading, carrying, breeding, competitions, pets and such, kupo!”

“Oh...” Harry muttered, “Hey, do you have a name?” Harry asked, realizing that he can’t refer this creature as Moogles for long.

“My name?” the moogles asked, landing on the ground with a soft flump. “The name’s Moco Marle! You can call me ‘Moco’, kupo!” Moco stretched out its tiny hand to Harry.

“Harry Potter, please to meet you,” Harry replied shaking the tiny hand of Moco, “Sorry for letting you wonder awhile ago. You see, I’m kind of lightheaded at the moment...”

The Moogles named Moco made a “kupo” sound and fluttered around the air.

“Well, that’s okay, kupo. It’s not my first time to encounter people with amnesia.”

“Amnesia?” Harry asked, taken aback. “W-what do you mean? My memory is perfectly fine, thank you!” said Harry defensively.

“Kupo?” Moco tilted his head, “On the contrary, I think you do have a memory problem! I mean, you can’t even tell if that I’m a Moogles or say that Choco is a Chocobo! What’s up with that, kupo?”

Harry shook his head, feeling confused. Why was Moco implying that he should know what a Moogles and a Chocobo is?

“Okay,” said Harry, “I’m just lost so I have no idea where I am at... or even how I got here...”

“Hold on a sec,” Moco said, landing on the ground, “You have no idea how you got to Gysahl Plains, kupo?”

“That’s the name of this place?” Harry asked, looking around the green land.

Moco palmed his face and sighed.

“So you’re telling me you found yourself here? Unknown on how you got here?”

Harry nodded.

“Oh, kupo nuts,” said Moco, “You must see a White Mage at the moment!”

“Sorry but what’s a White Mage?” Harry asked. He didn’t like the fact that Moco is saying things he had no idea of. It felt like when he was eleven when Hagrid told him he was a wizard.

“A White Mage is one of the many Job Classes you can take, kupo!” said Moco, “They can heal any disease! Well, at least I think they can.”

“Like Healers?”

“If you put it that way, yes, kupo,” Moco nodded politely.

Harry blinked. Where did he wake up to? And How in bloody hell did he get here?

Yeah, Ron would probably – Oh. My. Merlin....

It dawned to him like a hippogriff hitting him on the head with its talons.

“Ron! Hermione!” Harry gasped.

“Kupo?” Moco asked.

Harry quickly looked around the green pastures. Was it possible that they were here too in this unknown place?

Darting away from Moco, Harry looked at the dirt path behind him; there was nothing but a stretch of land, and the dirt path led to the distance, enveloped by the green hills beyond.

“Ron!” Harry called out, “Hermione!”

“Don’t shout, kupo!” Moco said, flying to Harry, “Or you’ll attract the fiends!”

“Moco,” Harry spun around on Moco, “Did you, by any chance, ran into a boy with red hair and a girl with bushy brown hair?”

“Nope,” said Moco, scratching the back oh his rabbit-like ears. “The only hume I saw on the way is you, kupo!”

“Damn!” Harry swore, looking around, “Are you sure?”

“Positive, kupo,” said Moco, fluttering back to the ground.

How could that be possible? They should be here... I know it. Ron could be just sitting on the grass, wondering what’s going on and Hermione... Hermione....

Harry groaned. He almost forgot that he and Hermione didn’t depart at the best terms. The thought of it made Harry even more worried.

“Y-you seem anxious, kupo....” Moco walked in front of Harry.

“M-my friends,” Harry said softly. “W-where am I, Moco?” he asked suddenly.

“Gysahl Plains, a Chocobo haven, kupo,” Moco replied.

“I mean what continent? Europe? Asia? North America?” Harry asked, kneeling before the Moogles in desperation.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa! What are these places you speak of, kupo?” Moco asked, shaking his head in confusion, “You really need to see a White Mage! There’s a place over there,” he pointed at the distant settlement Harry saw earlier, “They have a White Mage over there, kupo.”

“I – I don’t need a White Mage, Moco –” said Harry, looking around for a sign of red or brown. “What I need is to find my friends –”

“But surely you need one, don’t you?” Moco asked politely.

Harry looked at Moco... he didn't understand how important Ron and Hermione were to him.

"Seriously, Harry," said Moco, shaking his head. "You look disheveled. You can't go on around Atrynömunal looking like that, kupo!"

"Atrai – what?" Harry turned to Moco.

"Oh, my Bahamut!" said Moco, shooting up to the air again, "Don't tell me you forgot where you live!"

"I already told you," said Harry irritably. "I have no idea where I am!"

"Seriously, kupo? You have no idea that you're in the realm of Atrynömunal?"

Harry stopped dead but shook his head with uncertainty.

What is Atrynömunal?

"A-are you saying I'm not in Earth anymore?" Harry said perplexedly, dread creeping up his face.

"Earth?" Moco tilted his head, "Are you referring to the element that the Job Class 'Elementalist' use, kupo?" Moco asked.

"N-no, I mean Earth! The planet!" Harry said in panic. He could feel his legs growing numb as he spoke.

"There is only one planet, kupo!" said Moco, "And that is Atrynömunal, kupo!"

Harry looked at the ground. There's something going on in here.... Another planet? How could it be? Was he dreaming?

Harry pinched himself and felt the searing sting on his arm. He felt it and saw that it was real as ever. He wasn't dreaming at all.

How did I get here? I remember being at Hogwarts... w-what happened again?

Harry pondered as he placed a finger on his chin. He tried so hard to remember what happened at Hogwarts... it was like a trying to get a blurred picture going into view.

I... remember Hermione and I fighting... about a project....

He could see, in his mind's eye, his argument with Hermione. It somehow pained him that it was hours since he last met her and that they didn't leave on a good note.

What's there to remember? Wait – Professor Raptor gave me a book to help me in the project!

Then it hit him: F.F.O.

Yes!

Harry could see the image clearing up as he saw himself fighting with goblins that littered the school in destruction. The book that caused all of the mayhem in Hogwarts... Professor Raptor – Great, I have a feeling he must be lost in this world too – reckoned that the book caused what happened in Hogwarts.

We fought with a... er, a Behemoth!

The image of the terrible, purple beast came to his mind. It was almost horrifying to think of encountering that again. The vision became clearer when he finally saw the meteor falling down from the sky. Professor Raptor's friend, Accula, the writer of the book, said that it was the Behemoth's final blow before its death.

Then what happened?

The book flashed a glowing light! His stomach lurched when he finally remembered. He heard voices but he couldn't recall what they said but he remembered something grab him, thrusting him to darkness.

But where was he thrust into? His head ached at thinking too much that he probably think the book –

Oh, my Merlin....

He was sucked into the book of F.F.O.!

Harry's heart raced. Looking at the distant trees, he hated himself for thinking that he was, indeed, not at home anymore. Was he really in another world? Did F.F.O. send him to another world? Another realm?

I must be dreaming!

But alas, he wasn't, after pinching himself again. Harry tried to elaborate to himself that there's a logical explanation into getting sucked into a book. It could be like the Pensieve for all Harry knew. He looked up, expecting to see a hole that showed the ceiling of the Gryffindor common room but there was nothing but clear blue sky.

D-don't panic, Harry! R-remember, you're not the only one in this place! There were others who were with you! Didn't Ron say Hermione disappeared? She must've dived into the book too!

But the question remains; Who was exposed to it?

Ron....

Hermione....

Professor Raptor....

Accula....

And me....

That makes everyone five. Harry ignored the thought of a possible sixth but it was impossible since no one would be near the common room when they fought the Behemoth.

Just focus on your friends first, Harry.

His mind went back to Ron and Hermione. The thought of the two of them lost in a different dimension made him want to move and take some action. He knew what his first priority was and that is to find his best friends, Professor Raptor and Accula.

“Are you okay, kupo?” Moco asked, after gazing at Harry’s brooding form.

Harry woke from his reverie and turned to the Moogle.

“I - I’m fine...” his voice was rather croaky. “I - I just realized something” said Harry.

“Er – look, Harry, right?” Moco walked up to Harry, “I don’t know what’s going on but I – I think its best that you at least take a breather, kupo.”

Harry looked down at the Moogle. Moco looked at him with his blue eyes and for the first time ever since waking up, Harry smiled. It was hard to not to think Moco was cuddly and cute. So far, now that Harry thought about it, Moco’s been nice and understandable to him.

“Kweh!”

Harry and Moco turned to see Choco galloping around the patch of grass. It flapped its wings joyfully as it jumped over a lone log. It was playing around, Harry thought. It also occurred to him that Choco wore a green scarf around its neck.

“I – I think I need someplace to rest,” said Harry quietly, feeling the breeze brush his face gently.

“Don’t worry,” said Moco, grinning up at Harry, “There’s a tiny settlement over called Klauser where a White Mage can be found.”

“Yeah,” Harry nodded, “Let’s go then.”

“I’ll just go get Choco –” Moco walked over the hill and whistled, “Hey, Choco! Come here, kupo!”

The large Chocobo stopped its frolic and looked at Moco. Harry thought it was the cutest thing in the world due to how it stared at Moco with its black beady eyes.

“C’m on, Choco!” Moco hopped, waving his arms at the bird. “We need a little transportation!”

“Kweh!” Choco chirped and instead of running towards Moco, it turned on its talon heels and ran down the dirt path.

“CHOCO!!” Moco flailed his arms, “Holy Bahamut...” he hung his head low then turned to Harry, “Looks like we have to walk to Klauser, kupo.”

“How about Choco – ?”

“He’ll be fine,” said Moco, “He always runs like this when we reach the ranch, kupo.”

“Ranch?” Harry asked.

“Yep, ranch, kupo!” Moco hopped happily. “I own one not too far from here! We just have to go to Klauser then take a right turn down the path road, up a hill, go pass the edge of a forest patch and viola! My place will go into view in no time, kupo!”

“I’ll say,” Harry said, feeling dazed at the directions Moco mentioned.

“After we get you to a White Mage, I’ll take ya to see my ranch!” said Moco proudly. “My father owns it though but I’m the show runner, kupo! I breed Chocobos for over a year now. Choco is my best Chocobo and I’m planning to enter him in the Annual Chocobo Lightning Tourney in Gergone for the prize gil!”

“That’ll be nice,” said Harry, feeling a sudden surge of excitement in him. It dawned to him that he was in a new world. What could possibly lie in store for him?

Maybe I can worry about my friends later... I mean, there's nothing they can't handle, right?

He felt unsure about this thought but what choice does he have? Ron, Hermione, Professor Raptor and Accula are unlikely to turn up at the moment so there's no choice but to go with Moco. Who knows? Harry might find Ron lying at the front of Moco's ranch.

"Shall we?" Moco said, poising himself for departure. "Be careful while we walk though, we might hit a rock or two and I wouldn't want those leather boots go to waste, kupo!"

"Wha - ?"

Leather boots?

Harry looked at his feet to see he wasn't wearing the trainers he wore at Hogwarts. Let alone that he wasn't wearing his Hogwarts school uniform at all!

Like Moco said, Harry wore brown leather boots that reached up to his shins. He wore dark red knight pants that were slightly baggy but looked fit on him. The ends of his pants were tucked neatly into his boots that Harry wondered if he was the one who did it. Up on his thighs, he noted how he wore dark leather cuisses. Feeling his chest, he saw that he wore a chainmail vest that was made of fine silver iron.

Beneath this vest, he wore a dark red long-sleeved shirt made of cotton. Cuffed around his wrists were leather braces that had splendid embroidery on the top. Closely, Harry saw the embroidery showcased an image of a head of a dragon. Stretching to his hands were leather gloves that only covered his palms and backhands; his fingers were quite visible as they protruded from the gloves. He reached for his shoulders to feel thin leather spaulders that matched the color of his silver chainmail.

"H-how did I get these?" Harry asked in amazement. He looked at his leather gloves with wide eyes.

“I guess you don’t know about them too, kupo,” Moco sighed, smiling sadly at Harry.

“N-no,” said Harry, looking at his boots. He had to admit, he was quite comfortable in his new attire.

“Well, looking at your clothes, you work for the Warrior Guild at the kingdom of Biestavale, kupo,” Moco said, tilting his head to observe Harry.

“I see – wait...” Harry looked at Moco, “Warrior guild?”

“You are one, aren’t you?” said Moco, “I guess you forgot about that too, kupo!”

“I don’t have amnesia!” Harry retorted, “I’m just lost and I have no idea where I am, that’s all! Just answer me... what did you mean by warrior?”

Moco rubbed his furry chin sagely and spoke.

“In the Eastern continent, that’s where we are at, when one turns eighteen, they have a choice to sign up for a Job Class, kupo.”

“Go on,” said Harry, feeling the need to know this.

“There are several Job Classes around the continent, kupo. Even beyond the Eastern Continent –” He waved around his surroundings with his hand, “– Other Job Classes exists! You are a Warrior based on your clothing, as far as I can observe, kupo.”

“Really?” Harry looked at himself, “What are you then?”

“Me? That remains to be seen, kupo.” Moco said, “My subclass is a Chocobo Breeder. Subclasses are like ‘side jobs’ one can take before they go to the main and more ambitious Job Classes, kupo. I wish to become a Mog Knight, by the way.”

“Is it a required thing to get a job? I mean, is it a must?” Harry asked.

“Kinda... erm... it’s self-fulfilled, kupo.” Moco said, “There are many fiends that tread around the land and everyone needs to learn how to fight if they want go from town to town, kupo.”

“Oh,” Harry said, looking at his gloves again.

After realizing it, Harry reached for his pockets... much to his dismay, even if he expected it, his wand was nowhere in sight.

Great, I guess F.F.O. took it too.... How can I defend myself?

“Er... I don’t have a sword.” Harry said, discerning to the fact that he had no sword around his belt.

“Klauser has a weapon shop so maybe you can check out a sword or two, kupo.”

The same euphoria that filled his own being when he got his first wand surged across Harry. A sword? This could be interesting.

“C’mon, Harry,” said Moco, taking a step forward, “Choco is probably dipping his head down a Chocobo water basin, kupo.”

- - -

“This is Klauser,” said Moco as they climbed up the top of the hill.

Harry reached the top and saw that Klauser was a small place. Not bigger than half the Great Hall back at Hogwarts. It was bordered by a circle of light brown dirt. Four structures were placed strategically at away from the center where a dead bonfire stood. The structures were wooden circular huts topped with straw roofs that were shaped like droopy pointed hats.

The first structure to his left looked like a general store since, through the window, Harry could spot bread, cans of peas, beans, apples, and the like taking their places at the shelves.

To his right, the hut had a sign that hung on a metal beam. Harry couldn't make out what the sign met but it had a picture of a brown staff.

"That's where the White Mage is," said Moco, registering Harry's gaze. "That one over there," he pointed to another hut at the upper-right that had a sign with an image of a sword on it, "is the weapon shop. Quite cheap but they have good swords, kupo!"

Harry looked around and saw that between the weapon shop and the White Mage hut was a gap where another dirt road stretched beyond.

"Go through there and you'll see my Chocobo Ranch, kupo," said Moco happily. "Over there," he pointed to another dirt path to the left of the weapon shop, "Is the north path that leads to Bies – Choco!"

Harry followed Moco's gaze and drinking by a water basin beside the general store was Choco. It lifted its head and kwehed Moco cutely before dunking its head to drink at the water basin again.

"Heh, he'll be alright there," said Moco, turning to Harry, "He's always taking in the water there every time we pass here, kupo."

"Is the place always this empty?" Harry asked, relaxing by the wind's caress of his face.

"Not really... it's only at nighttime where travelers come and rest here is where the place is quite alive with activity; travelers of different races rest by the fire, telling stories, trading goods, singing songs. Its good business whenever nighttime arrives, kupo.

"There are only six people in this settlement. The store owner lady of the store over there," he pointed to the general store where a middle-aged woman sorted potatoes, "Her husband who works at the weapons shop," he nodded to the weapon shop where the chimney started exuding smoke. "The inn," he pointed to the last hut Harry has yet to identify, "is where the inn keeper and his two children work at. It's a family business, kupo."

“So that’s an inn?” Harry looked at the building which was the largest from the four.

“Yes, that’s an inn,” said Moco, “Only ten gils, kupo, and you get a comfy bed for a night. Add three gils and you get a glass of chocolate milk, kupo!” Moco smacked his lips. “It’s quite comfy too!”

“Er – what’s gil?” Harry asked timidly.

Moco rolled his eyes.

“It’s the currency of Atrynömunal.... Please tell me you didn’t forget to bring any, kupo!” Moco said.

“I’m not sure,” said Harry, reaching for his pocket for his moneybag. Luckily, it was still there. “All I have is –” he pulled it out and dropped the contents of the moneybag onto his hands, “– this.”

And to his surprise, instead of gold Galleons, silver Sickles and bronze Knuts, twelve pieces of platinum colored coins with engraved drawings of beasts landed on his palms.

“See? You do have gil, kupo!” Moco said happily.

Harry was astounded. Did his cash changed on his way here?

“T-to be honest, I’m not really the good in counting this,” said Harry sheepishly.

“Don’t worry, everyone can learn a new thing, kupo,” Moco said, “A gil coin has five values; one gil, five gil, ten gil, fifteen gil and twenty gil.”

“How can I tell which is which?” Harry asked looking at one coin. He could see an engraving of a beautiful woman’s face.

“There are numbers engraved at the back of the coins. The one you are looking at is a gil value of ten, kupo.”

Harry turned the coin around and saw the number ten on the platinum coat.

“What are the drawings for?” Harry asked, looking at a twenty-gil coin, checking that it had an engraved drawing of a faceless bird’s head with forked lightning bolts around it.

“The drawings don’t indicate the values, kupo,” said Moco, “Gil values will always stay the same no matter what picture you’ll get. Because of this, some people collect gil and display them on cases instead of spending them.... Kind of like a collection, kupo.”

“What are they?” Harry asked, looking at the drawings.

“Sentinels, kupo,” said Moco wryly. “But we’ll have talk of Sentinels later – let’s get yourself a visit to the White Mage, kupo.”

Placing his newfound gil back to his moneybag, the two set off for the White Mage’s hut.

Moco led the way by fluttering to the doorknob, opening it as Harry entered the hut. Harry thought he entered the Gryffindor common room. Everything was draped in red; the curtains, the squashy armchairs and the red carpet that was lain on the wooden floor. After traveling at the cool outdoors, it felt comfortably warm inside due to the fireplace the blazed happily to the right of the room. The walls were heavily decorated with portraits of creatures Harry knew nothing about. Above, Harry saw the rafters blended well with the living room.

Right across Harry, at the center of the wall, was a door that had a sign posted on it:

The White Mage is: IN

Below that was a longer sign:

My Dear Patients!

Kindly wait for your turn by the lovely fire that I unreservedly prepared for you from the goodness of my heart.

And that would be 15 Gil for services.

Signed,

White Mage. Emtoo Witdim

“Is that a good price?” Harry asked, after reading the sign.

“Kupo!” Moco nodded. “Most White Mages pay around twenty-five gil back at the capital city so you bet my bonbon that its cheap here. The quality of service is good too, kupo. Come, let’s sit down....”

The two sat on squashy armchairs that faced the fireplace. Harry leaned forward to look at the shiny coffee table that separated him from the fireplace. He sniffed the aroma of strawberries that radiated around the room. It was very pleasant.

Grrr....

Harry touched his belly and noticed how hungry he felt. It was like his dinner back at the Great Hall was days ago.

“That grumbling tummy doesn’t mean its happy, kupo,” said Moco, smirking at Harry from his seat. “But don’t worry, I have food back at the ranch. That way, you won’t have to spend on anything but the White Mage services and your sword, kupo.”

“Who are the people in those portraits?” Harry asked, pointing to a portrait of a handsome looking man, holding a magnificent sword with his left hand. The handsome man was standing on the body of a large dark gray hawk with a cross on its breast, looking triumphant.

“That man is James Retto,” said Moco, “The hero of the Great Atrynömunal War ten years ago.”

“Wow...” said Harry, Retto’s dark grey hair. “He looks angry...” Harry pointed out his light blue eyes.

“That’s just the artist’s portrayal of him. His appearance is all relative but the most accurate representation of Master Retto is at the city of Corneria, kupo.”

“How about that?” Harry asked, pointing to the portrait behind him. It depicted a large city skyline with flying ships flying through it. Every building was colored with a mix of brown, red and green.

“That’s a portrait of Skyld,” said Moco, looking up, “I’ve never been there but I would love to check it out, kupo.”

“Do you travel a lot?” Harry asked.

“Not really...” Moco shook his head, his red bonbon tumbling left and right, “The only place I have ever gone to was my home village, Mog Village and Biestavale.”

“Biestavale?”

“The capital city of the kingdom,” Moco said, “You’ll probably know the details when the White Mage cures you, kupo.”

“But I don’t have —”

The door of the White Mage’s office suddenly opened. Harry’s and Moco’s heads turned to the door to see a short black cloaked creature exit out of it. Harry couldn’t make out the face because he had his hood up the whole time.

“Tell him I said ‘hi’,” called the voice from inside the office. Harry knew it was directed to the black cloaked one who was already halfway across the room.

“I will, Emtoo,” said the creature in a rough, raspy high pitched voice that sounded like Moco’s. The creature turned to the office door’s direction and Harry registered the creature’s yellow brownish long pointy ears with black arrowhead shapes on the tip of it. “Just don’t forget that you owe me!”

A sound of a chair scraping on the wood came to and seconds later, White Mage Emtoo appeared at his office door’s threshold.

“That wasn’t a bet, Deathly!” Emtoo cried in a comical voice.

Harry found White Mage Emtoo... weird. First and foremost, he wasn't a human at all. He looked tall and bulky under his white robes. His head looked pointed and his ears looked like horns that protruded upwards at the top of his skull. Poking out of the holes of his robe sleeves were three fingered hands that were as white as snow. It would've been a scary sight but the fact that his fingertips were round made him all the more innocent, if not deadly.

Harry couldn't see beneath his robes but he thought he could see paws that stood on its toes.

To top the weird appearance of Emtoo, the White Mage wore round heavy tinted glasses that were so tinted, you couldn't see his eyes. And to add to that, Emtoo sported a thick white mustache that looked well combed.

"A bet is when you put your gil on the line and putting your tens on a damn Cactuar battle is counted as a bet!" said the black cloaked creature.

"To each his own," said Emtoo. Harry noticed that as he spoke, his large thick white mustache moved. "Besides, you owe me too!"

"Same page," said the black cloaked creature, looking up at Emtoo.

"Hey, I'm serious here," said Emtoo, pointing at the creature with his rounded finger, "After that Cactuar fiasco, you took all my patients!"

"How many times did I tell you?" spat the black cloaked creature, its ears twitched irritably, "We allocated!"

"Allocated my ass, by Bahamut's name!" said Emtoo angrily.

"Well –" said the creature, trying to find a retort, "– if you would've learned the math then maybe – just maybe – you would've allocated more efficiently, by Ultima's name!"

"Gah!" said Emtoo, placing a hand on his chest dramatically yet comically. "Touche," he sighed, looking at the ground.

"I rest my case," said the creature, nodding a bow. "Anyway, I have to go back; an air-taxi is waiting for me at Manem."

"Yeah, yeah," said Emtoo, waving a hand lazily, "Just remember to close the door on the way out and tell the folks I said 'hi', will ya?"

"You got it," nodded the creature, "I'll see you next week if I can... your birthday is next week."

"Thanks, I almost forgot," Emtoo squinted at a calendar that was pinned against the wall near the fireplace.

"Oh yeah," the creature nodded to Harry and Moco, "You got patients to attend, slacker!"

Harry saw the creature look at him. Harry didn't know what to do but he wished the black cloaked one would look away... he looked creepy. Fortunately, the creature turned on his heel and went for the door.

"I'll tend to you, my dear sir and master Moogle," said Emtoo in a surprisingly professional voice that was so unlike his previous one. "—erm, Deathly?"

The creature named Deathly stopped at mid-opening of the door and turned to Emtoo.

"Catch," said Emtoo before tossing an apple over the black cloaked one that the fruit went outside.

"You bastard!" cried Deathly and in a swift movement, he left the door to — as Harry assumed — chase the thrown apple.

"So what can I do for ya?" asked Emtoo politely, walking in front of them. Harry found his figure against the fire quite sinister. He wished Emtoo took off his heavily tinted glasses.

"Erm, my friend here needs a brain check," said Moco, "He kinda hit his head by my Chocobo, kupo."

“Ah yes,” Emtoo nodded sagely. “Short-term memory loss, I presume,”

It was best not to argue.

“Erm – yes,” said Harry.

“Alright,” said Emtoo, “This doesn’t need any complicated crap and what not so I’ll just perform a little magic that can give a remedy to your memory!”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning!” he raised a finger snappily. “That once I perform this little magic spell, you will be rendered into a trance that will allow yourself to showcase your missing memories! It will not bring back your whole memories back but it will kick your brain to thinking them again! It’s like a reminders notepad, eh?”

Harry looked at Moco who nodded at him assuringly.

“S-so... how is it done?” Harry asked nervously.

“This way,” said Emtoo, magically summoning a staff in mid-air with a wave of his hand. The staff materialized among waves of ethereal light.

And without warning, Emtoo struck Harry on the head with the end of his staff that Harry felt a searing pain cut across his skull. He started seeing white spots across his head that he thought he the lighting of the room changed drastically.

“Did it work?” asked Emtoo’s distant-sounding voice.

“What is Biestavale?” Moco asked, fluttering on the coffee table. “Can you remember what it looks like?”

“I – I....” Harry said dozily. He couldn’t think right. That sharp blow on the head was too painful. “I c-can’t remember.”

“Aghast!” Emtoo’s voice cried in a dramatic tone. “It didn’t work!”

Harry looked up and met the staff hit his head again.

“OUCH!” Harry yelled angrily, holding his skull tightly. “Why did you do that again!?”

“It had to be done,” said Emtoo gingerly, placing his staff on the side of the room. “But since that won’t work – Curaga!”

It felt like a blissful feeling.... At the moment of Emtoo’s voice of this mysterious incantation, Harry was enveloped by green stars, lights and golden bells that sprinkled white leaves. He couldn’t touch it but he felt comfortably cold, warm, relaxed, soothed. It was like all the pain in the world disappeared, including the one on his head and the lurking pain on his back.

“Wow....” Harry gasped, feeling his head. “What d-did you do?”

“Simple White Magic from yours truly,” Emtoo bowed gracefully. “I hope that helped, though.”

“I – I think it did,” said Harry quickly. He didn’t know why but he wanted to leave this place quickly. He was keen to buy a sword. “I – er – remember that I – I lived in...” he looked at the portrait of Skyld. “Skyld!”

“You did it, kupo!” said Moco, “I think it’s all coming back to you, eh?”

“Nothing I can’t handle,” said Emtoo, swelling his chest in pride. “Anyway,” he fixed himself to look like a gentleman. “That would be fifteen gil, please.”

Harry instantly paid for Emtoo’s White Mage services and he and Moco left the hut for the cool outdoors. He felt new after that spell, Harry thought. For some reason, Harry wanted to feel that again... but now wasn’t the time.

“Let’s check the sword shop, kupo,” said Moco, “C’mon!”

Moco and Harry entered the weapons shop which was uncomfortably hot. Harry wished he was back at Emtoo's hut after catching the smell of iron creep up his nose. The weapon shop was as small as Emtoo's hut except instead of a living room, everything was littered with armor, swords, shields, staffs and knives.

"It won't be too long," said Moco, walking up to the counter.

Five minutes later, Harry and Moco exited the weapons shop where Harry held out his new sword which Moco identified as a "Broadsword".

"It's only four hundred gil, kupo!" Moco squeaked. "That's a good price!"

"Yeah," said Harry, looking at the sword with pride, it wasn't too heavy too. "I didn't know I had that much money in my pocket!"

"Well, the better for you, kupo," said Moco happily. Now c'mon, let's go get Choco and I'll show you my ranch!"

Harry was about follow Moco when he heard footsteps behind him. Using his quick reflexes, Harry spun around and was met with three large men who entered through the dirt path that led north.

"Oh no..." Moco's voice said.

"W-what's wrong?"

"Bandits, kupo!" Moco cried quietly.

"How can you tell?" Harry asked.

"I've seen them threaten a couple of travelers a couple of weeks ago, kupo! C'mon, Harry... let's get Choco and go —"

"Hey you!" barked one of the bandits in a drawling voice. He was buff and wore a dirty set of knight armor. Harry thought he looked silly with the way he wore the iron skull cap that didn't fit his head.

Harry did not move. He didn't know what to do at the moment. He knew that he wasn't good enough for a fight but he can't lose his money now especially when he's in a world where his gil was needed!

"Look what we got 'ere, boys!" said the thinnest of them. His face was pointy and he spoke in a heavy Cockney accent. "A rat and one of Biestavale's finest!"

"J-just give them what they w-want, Harry," muttered Moco.

"See that?" said the fattest bandit with a deep voice. "The Moogle is giving the hume orders! For shame!"

"You know the drill," said the buff bandit. "Give, you live. Nigh, you die!"

"N-no," said Harry suddenly, feeling his courage rise.

"NO!" Moco squeaked.

"Oho!" scoffed the fat bandit, "Hey Raz, looks like we got a potential standoff right here!"

The thin bandit laughed maniacally.

"I see what you mean, Oz!" he said, looking at Harry with a threatening look. "I think we have no other choice but to cut down a few limbs together cut that bonbon out of his rat –"

"He's not a rat," said Harry, his anger rising but felt scared at the same time. If they were going to get his goods from him then he better put up a fight and he will not make it easy for them.

"He's not a rat, he says!" said the buff bandit, laughing mockingly. "You listen here, kid –we gave you a chance to walk away unharmed but looks like we have to force it out of ya!"

He turned to his bandit companions.

“Just do it like how we play it, boys!”

Harry felt like he was being conveyed to a battle sequence. The three bandits stood in a straight line, facing down at Harry and Moco. Harry breathed and wished they battled someplace else; the place was a bit small for a battle....

“We have to fight our way through!” Moco said, “Choco, kupo!” Moco whistled.

Then out of nowhere, Choco appeared from behind Harry, circled the two and stood beside Moco like a guardian.

“H-he can fight?” Harry asked, the fear in him bubbling.

“You don’t think Chocobo breeding means raising them to eat, sleep and pull carts, do ya?” Moco said, smirking.

Harry shook his head.

“Oh, well,” said Moco, “Let’s take the fight to them, kupo!”

“That rat would make a good carpet down at me hut, if you know what I mean!” the thin bandit taunted as he flailed his scimitar.

“Choco!” Moco cried, pointing at the thin bandit, “Choco Bash!”

Choco did a confident “Kweh!” and immediately charged towards the thin bandit. Harry’s jaw dropped slightly when Choco emitted yellow light around him as he ran. It was like a comet.

“Watch out, Raz!” barked the buff bandit.

It was too late, the yellow bird rammed right across the face of Raz as Choco rushed down the hill, round around the village on the fields and fluttered back to Moco, chirping a victorious “Kweh!”.

“Argh!” Raz groaned, sitting up. His face was bleeding severely. “Go get him, Yiz!”

The buff bandit roared a battle cry and ran towards Harry while he waved his large axe maddeningly. Harry raised his new sword up to the sky, thinking that this was the only way to defend.

Then in quick fashion –

CLANG!

Harry recoiled and fell on his bottom, his sword falling out of his hands. He grasped his sprained wrist and groaned.

“Ha!” Yiz jeered as he picked up the hilt Harry’s broadsword, “Looks like you broke a sword, kid!”

Harry looked up and was surprised to see Yiz hold half of what’s left of his new sword.

“Nigh, you die, warrior!” sneered Yiz, raising his axe to the sky. Harry was ready to dodge the blow when –

“Choco Bash!”

Suddenly, Yiz flew across the air after being hit by Choco again. He flew in a high arch and landed on the ground, coughing out dust at ground’s impact.

“ARGH!!” Oz yelled, waving a large sword that was so wide that Harry wondered how one could deflect it.

“Moco!” Harry warned, pointing to Oz who was now charging for Choco.

“No!” Moco cried.

But before Oz could let his sword and Choco meet, Oz recoiled violently and fell on his back.

“Ack!” Oz yelled, looking up to see what blocked him from attacking the Chocobo.

Harry and Moco looked in shock. Oz recoiled on impact by none other than the staff of White Mage Emtoo.

“You got nerve tainting Klauser with your highwaymen deeds, bandit,” said Emtoo in a dangerous voice. It was mind-boggling on how a wooden staff can parry a sword, Harry thought.

“And what if we do have nerves - !”

“Ah!” Emtoo raised his staff and pointed it at Oz’s neck. “I don’t think you’ll be showcasing that for long, bandit.”

Emtoo gestured beyond the north road and everyone’s heads turned. A group of three knights on Chocobos galloped inside Klauser. They looked that of royalty as they were wearing blue capes and their Chocobos dressed formally.

“Captain!” Emtoo waved at the first Chocobo rider happily, his staff still at Oz’s neck.

“White Mage,” the captain nodded in greeting and gazed around the fallen. “What happened?”

“A little run in with bandits,” said Emtoo in the air of one commenting the weather. “Big deal but hey, more power to you.”

“H-Harry,” said Moco, pulling Choco by the reins, “I – I think we should leave now, kupo.”

Harry thought it was best to leave everything to the authorities. Nodding to Moco, the two, with Choco, quickly fled the scene only to be stopped by Emtoo.

“Wait!” he called them as they were taking the dirt path to the right.

Harry and Moco turned to see Emtoo and the three Chocobo riders looking at them. Expecting to have questions tossed at him, the captain saluted.

“We would like to thank you for apprehending these bandits for us,” said the captain politely. He was human and had long brown hair. “It took us weeks but we finally caught up to them when we saw them skulking about the highway.”

“No problem, captain,” Moco nodded in respect. “W-we were just defending ourselves, kupo.”

“The important thing is that none of you two were hurt,” said Emtoo. “But speaking of which – Curaga!”

The same sensational feeling enveloped Harry again. He wished it could happen again the moment reality came back to him.

“Erm – is it okay if we go home now?” Moco asked timidly.

“Of course you can, master Moogles,” the captain smiled down at Moco. “After that bandit attack, I think its best that you stay in the comfort of your home.”

“By the way,” said Emtoo, looking at Choco. “That Chocobo is quite the fighter!”

“T-thanks,” Moco smiled modestly. “I – I taught him a few tricks, kupo.”

“Well, your value as a Chocobo breeder has its perks, eh?” Emtoo smirked and turned to the captain. “Shall we, captain?”

“Ah – yes,” then the captain saluted to Harry and Moco, “We thank you again for helping us capture these bandits.”

“Glad for the rescue, kupo!” Moco saluted back.

The captain nodded back and the next thing Harry knew, as he stood up on his feet, he saw the three guards leave Klauser with the bandits tethered to the Chocobos, cuffed in iron rings around their wrist and ankles.

“Heh,” said Emtoo, turning to Harry and Moco, “You two have a knack in the battle,” he said. “Sorry about your sword,” said Emtoo, picking up what was left of Harry’s sword.

“I – Its fine,” said Harry, wincing at the fact he spent a large chunk of his gil to buy that one. “I’m just glad I got out of that one.”

“Bandits patrol the highway just to pilfer from innocent travelers. Disgusting.” He glared at the moving figures at the distance. “Can’t have a moment of peace if one wants one! When will they learn?”

“Er... thanks, sir, kupo,” said Moco, pulling Choco by the reins. “For saving Choco.”

“Not a problem,” said Emtoo, waving a hand. “It is a horrible deed... you know, to kill a Chocobo. I would never see the end of it! But that Chocobo has got balls.” He turned to Harry. “It saved your life, right?”

Harry had to admit, Choco and Moco did save his life from getting axed by Yiz, the bandit and for that, he was grateful.

“I apologize for the inconvenience,” said Emtoo apologetically. “Bandits don’t usually pass Klauser....”

“It’s okay, sir,” said Harry, scratching the back of his head, smirking back to show that he was alright with it. “I – I’m just glad that we – er – still alive and that... yeah....”

“True,” Emtoo stroked his mustache comically. “That’s what matters... hmmm... now that I think about it, I shall inform the Royal Road Guards – those are the Chocobo-riding guys, if you don’t remember – about putting up a patrol around Gysahl Plains.”

“That would be wise, kupo,” Moco nodded. “But you’re powerful enough, aren’t you?”

“Come off it,” Emtoo waved his hand lazily, grinning modestly. “I’m just you’re ordinary White Mage, eh? Besides, as long as you want a head clonkin’, you know where to go!”

Harry couldn't help but laugh along with Moco and Emtoo. For the first time ever, he felt somewhat part of the unknown world he now treaded.

"Now if you will excuse me," Emtoo bowed, "I need to do a little errand to the Royal Road Guard station."

"We have to be on our way too, kupo." Moco said.

"I just hope we cross paths again, Moco," Emtoo nodded, smirking down at the Moogle.

"You know Choco and I will always pass by Klauser, kupo!" Moco replied happily.

"Er – thanks, sir," said Harry, bowing his head politely.

"No," Emtoo reached for Harry's hand and shook it, "Thank you! That last fifteen gil you gave me can finally fulfill my debt with –"

"The patient before me?" Harry asked.

"He's not a patient, per se," said Emtoo, "He's just a good friend of mine... I just forgot a debt I promised to pay."

"To be honest," said Harry, "I wouldn't be messing around the sort who owes the other money...."

"Eh," Emtoo raised his hands and dropped them again, "it's a living. Alright, enough with the talkies, I better move now."

"Yeah, us too," said Moco, "Goodbye!"

"See ya," Emtoo nodded and left the two alone when he entered his hut.

"That was a close one, kupo!" said Moco, turning to Harry. "Are you alright, Harry?"

"I am," said Harry, crouching before Moco, "Hey – I can't express how grateful I am back there... you saved my life."

"Well..." Moco scratched the back of his head embarrassingly, "I wouldn't let a nice guy like you go to waste, kupo."

Harry didn't stop himself but he placed a hand on Moco's head and ruffled his fur. Moco's fur felt very soft and smooth. He was very fluffy.

"Hey!" Moco chuckled, "You might mess the fur, kupo!"

"I think we should go, Moco," said Harry, standing up to full height.

"Let's!" Moco hopped happily and turned to Choco, "Do you want to give Harry a ride, Choco?"

Choco squawked and turned to Harry. Harry felt a bit intimidated how Choco stared down at him with its black beady eyes. It was like staring at a hippogriff; Harry didn't blink, afraid that it might peck him to death if he did.

"Wark!" it chirped, happily, waving its wings in a cute way.

"W-what does he want?" Harry asked anxiously.

"He accepts that you can ride on him, kupo!" said Moco, fluttering to the air. "C'mon, Choco will help!"

Choco chirped a "Kweh!" and sat on the ground like how a chicken would, giving Harry an easier job in climbing onto the Chocobo.

"Er...." Harry hovered nervously, looking at Choco.

"Just hop on in, kupo." Moco patted the feathery back of Choco. "Don't worry, if you pull him by the feathers, he will hardly feel it, kupo."

Harry nodded and slowly climbed on Choco. The Chocobo was surprisingly calm as Harry put his full weight on it.

“W-what’s next – woah!”

Harry flung his arms around the bird’s neck as Choco quickly stood to full height.

“Choco! Don’t scare Harry like that, kupo!” Moco said, as he fluttered to Choco’s head. “Take the reins, Harry.”

Harry grabbed the reins of Choco and looked at Moco.

“You know how to ride a Chocobo?” Moco asked.

Remembering how he handled Buckbeak during his third year, Harry nodded.

“Then let’s get on with it,” Moco sat comfortably on Choco’s head, “Be careful when we gallop, your leather boots might fall off, kupo!”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” said Harry, looking at his leather boots.

“To the ranch, Choco!” Moco called.

A minute later, Harry felt his body going up and down as the Chocobo rode down the hill towards dirt path, unknown on what lies before him.

- - -

“We are here!” Moco said as they jumped off Choco.

Harry jumped down and saw what a Chocobo ranch looked like. From afar, he could see a tiny hut that looked identical to Hagrid’s except instead of stone, the hut was made of straw and wood. To the left of the hut was a vast lake that reached to the horizons beyond. To the right of the hut was a field which was inhabited by a fair number of other Chocobos. Harry saw in amazement as the birds did their own business from afar.

“A ranch by the lake is a perfect ranching area for Chocobos,” Moco said, “My father taught me, kupo!”

“Where is your father?” Harry asked.

“He’s a Chocobo trader at Biestavale,” Moco said, as he walked down the dirt path that led to his hut, “C’mon, I will show you inside, kupo!”

Harry followed the Moogle down the path, he looked left and right to see the faded images of mountains beyond and the patches of forests that littered the green fields around them.

Moco’s hut was comfortable as they entered. The living room had lots of furniture of different colors (mainly green) and the walls were littered with pictures of Chocobos. There were chairs that range from many sizes and shapes. Harry felt a gentle, soothing breeze that came from an open window that had its curtains ripple gently.

“Sit down! I’ll get some refreshments, kupo,” Moco said, walking to another room to his right that led to the kitchen.

Harry looked behind him and sat down at the first chair he saw, observing the room in awe. It was an interesting room filled with stuff Harry hasn’t seen in his life.... There was a large spiral looking staff hanging on the wall to his left and to his right, there were funny looking instruments that were shaped in funny creatures. Hanging above the ceiling was a one out of a hundred scale model of a black and purple dragon. Harry thought it looked like a cross between a Hungarian Horntail and a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

“I got that for my birthday present last month, kupo.”

Harry turned away from the dragon model and saw Moco carrying a tray of cookies and milk.

“Sorry?” Harry said as he took some of the cookies and a glass of milk that Moco offered.

“That’s a model of the legendary Sentinel, Bahamut, King of Dragons,” said Moco, looking up at the dragon model with pride.

“What’s a ‘sentinel’?” Harry asked, taking a bite of his cookie.

“I was expecting such a question, kupo” said Moco, smiling as he placed the tray on the coffee table and fluttered to a seat. “A Sentinel is a guardian that originates from an unknown dimension. Thousands of years ago, there was an era called the Dark Espa when Necromancers would kill the inhabitants of Atrynömunal using the powers of the undead.”

Harry had a sudden image of Death Eater look-a-likes controlling a large group of Inferi.

“It was also the era when the infamous Mage Wars happened, kupo.” Moco said, taking a bite of his cookie, “The Mage Wars, as most people call it, was a battle against the Necromancers and the Acolytes. War was endless in all sides, kupo! Not a child could sleep soundly when those dark times happened!”

“Who were the Acolytes?”

“They are the good guys in the Mage Wars. Oppositely, they wield the power of light and focus more on protecting the innocent... you know, that cliché stuff we all read in books, kupo.”

“How long did the war go?” Harry asked, suddenly intrigued by this story.

“Years, I don’t have my history book at the moment but it happened for many years, kupo. Through and through, the Mage Wars continued on; women and children died, countless casualties on either side.... It was terrible, kupo.

“But after those dark years of struggle that four divine beings that goes by the name of ‘Alexander’, ‘Shiva’, ‘Ultima’ and ‘Bahamut,’ he pointed to the dragon model upward, “These four turned the tide of the war in the Acolytes favor forming peace in the land when the Necromancer King, Dark Lord Palazzo died at the hands of Bahamut in the climatic battle at Sentinelia thousands of years ago, kupo.”

“Sentinelia?”

“It’s was once the home of the Necromancer King but after the battle, it was christened as ‘Sentinelia, the Haven of Zeal’ in honor of the Bahamut and his companions. There was unending happiness across Atrynömunal, kupo. The people treated their saviors as high almighty beings that they begged them to stay with them. They agreed in the end.

“Ultima, the wisest of the four, said that she will give a few chosen ones the power to summon them when they are in need of help.... It was then that the Conjurers were born and the reign of the Sentinels.”

“Conjurers?”

“Conjurers are the precursors to the Summoners, kupo.” said Moco, “A Summoner is an extinct branch of magical people, by the way but I’ll get to that later – anyway, at the Post-Dark Espa era, the Conjurers had the responsibility to protect the people by using their powers to summon the mighty Sentinels to their aid. But for every great power, there will always be a great responsibility.”

“Abuse of power?”

“Correct, kupo!” Moco nodded, stuffing another cookie into his mouth. “There was a time that a Conjuror would go bad, kupo. I mean, he had the power to summon one of the strongest beings in the planet, hello! That’s like having seven hundred Masamunes in one hand, kupo!”

“Masamune...?”

“Er – it’s a legendary sword that was owned by Skyld’s king, King Leonardo Francisco. No one knows if it exists or not but it’s quite a fun legend to know about, kupo! But first, let’s get on with Sentinels, shall we?”

Harry sat back, picked up his glass and drank his milk, ready to listen.

“So... Sentinels, kupo,” Moco continued, rubbing his chin, “Like I said, the Conjurers had the power to summon the almighty Sentinels at will so with that knowledge – well – you can guess what they did....”

“Not really,” said Harry.

“Well, one of the many notable deeds they’ve done is to threaten a fellow kingdom to bow down to them, kupo.”

“You’re telling me that they, the Sentinels, would just do stuff for the Conjurers like that? Without question?”

“Kupo,” Moco nodded sadly, “Yes but remember that Ultima chose the best men and women for the job, kupo! They weren’t your ordinary humes, Vieras, bangaas and the like, kupo. They were really clever! Clever enough to hoodwink the Sentinels into taking over a kingdom by making up a cock-and-bull story about how that kingdom is evil and such making the Sentinels help them, kupo.”

“I doubt all of them bent to their will,” said Harry.

“True,” said Moco, “It was the King of Dragons, the Sentinel Bahamut who was able to read into the minds of the Conjurers’ nasty deeds. This discovery of the Conjurers’ abuse led to a disagreement between Bahamut and Ultima. Ultima thought that Bahamut was making up stories and that what they were doing, they did it for Atrynömunal and she said that if Bahamut tries to trick her into something fishy then things will get ugly for the both of them, kupo! Bahamut and Ultima were at the top of their prime and Ultima didn’t like the fact that she was like – er – as my father would put it – second kupo nut to Bahamut.”

“Second kupo nut?”

“Yeah, like a sidekick.... Anyways, that’s when the real conflict happened, kupo. Their disagreements led the two Sentinels into a big fight which sparked the War of the Sentinels. It was then that Atrynömunal would be the spectators of this grand war. For the record, this war, the War of the Sentinels was considered the greatest war in Atrynömunal history, kupo! The only war that could equal its splendor and grandeur is the Great Atrynömunal War ten years ago.”

“Are you telling me,” said Harry, his interest beginning to grow, “That this war of the Sentinels were only about the Sentinels?”

“Oh no,” Moco shook his head, a grin spreading across his face, “Don’t forget that Ultima didn’t believe Bahamut’s claim regarding the Conjurers, kupo. It was at this time that the Conjurers became too abusive for their own good, kupo!”

“What about the Sentinels?”

“All Sentinels had a side to choose and everyone who believed Bahamut’s claim sided with Dragon King and the ones who believed Ultima went to her side, kupo. By a majority of most people in this land, everyone reckons that Bahamut is the good side. Despite claims from others, the whole ‘Who is the Good Sentinel? Who is the Bad Sentinel?’ is still a hot topic today, kupo.”

“Oh... and the War?”

“Oh, the war was terrible,” Moco said, drinking his milk glass. “It finally reached to the ears of the Conjurers about the fight between Bahamut and Ultima that they took advantage of this.... Blinded by her arrogance, Ultima would take in every filthy lie the Conjurers fed her regarding how Bahamut did this and that, kupo. Everything went into chaos so much that it gave birth to the first of the dreaded Dark Sentinels Adrammelech, Ifrit, Odin and Atomos.”

“Question,” said Harry, realizing it, “How many Sentinels are there?”

“Excluding from Bahamut, Ultima, Shiva and Alexander?” Moco raised his eyebrows. “Lots, kupo. The number of Sentinels varied when the War of the Sentinels waged on. It was quite confusing on who’s who but as far as we all know, there are unknown Sentinels who are deemed legendary or non-existent, kupo.”

“Are any of them are still alive?” Harry asked.

“I’ll get to that,” said Moco. “Anyway, the Dark Sentinels were spawned from the darkness that grew in Ultima’s heart. Her hatred for Bahamut caused the birth of Adrammelech, The World Destroyer who

used his purple flames that could melt any metal, kupo. Then you have Ifrit, the Demon Demigod of Fire, Odin, the Ethereal Death Knight and Atomos, Sentinel of Time and Space. Ultima and the four Dark Sentinels, alongside with numerous Dark Sentinels, fought against Bahamut and the Sentinels Shiva, Alexander, Quezacotl and the ever strong Knights of the Round. Like the Dark Sentinels, the Sentinels had more than the ones I mentioned, kupo.

“After five years of war, the final battle ironically took place in the land where the Sentinels came to be, Sentinelia. It was here where Bahamut and his mighty Sentinels defeated the Dark Sentinels. Witnesses of this great battle could call it the most climatic battle ever, kupo. Everywhere, in the great land of Sentinelia, was just pure battle. Sentinels against Dark Sentinels, magic and attacks, flying everywhere, kupo! The inhabitants of nearby villages could overlook the flashes of light that sparked from the battle area.”

” How big are the Sentinels anyway?”

“Really big, kupo,” said Moco, “But they vary in size but they’re generally big.”

“What happened in the end?” Harry asked, remembering the story.

“As I said, Bahamut had the battle won, kupo. He dueled with Ultima resulting to her defeat. He had the chance to destroy her once and for all but no because Bahamut, the King of Dragons, the Noble Sky-God, the Optimal Sentinel, knew better than to kill the misunderstood, kupo.”

“Bahamut and Ultima reconciled with each other?”

“Yes, Ultima and Bahamut became friends once more, finally understanding what they all wanted... and that was peace for Atrynömunal. In turn, the Sentinels prosecuted and killed the Conjurers then banished the Dark Sentinels to stone, kupo. It was here on that the Sentinels called forth the most holy of men and women... the White Mages.”

“Like Emtoo?”

“Yes, but these White Mages, pure in spirit, were given the gift to be the Sentinels’ callers... we call them today as the ‘Summoners’, kupo. All was well for another year of thousands....”

Harry thought it was the end until...

“But,” Moco continued, “During the dawn of the Light Espa-era, there was jealousy amongst the people in the land. The War of the Sentinels showcased the ultimate power of the Sentinels bringing forth envy among most Atrynömuniāns, kupo. They wanted the same powers as the Summoners but couldn’t do anything about it. That jealousy led to the infamous ‘Purge of the Summoners’ where people from far and wide would kill every Summoner. This envy that burned into the hearts of many just showed nothing but the darkness of everyone’s heart.

“There were detractors to the Purge, kupo. These detractors protected the Summoners but they all died defending them due to being outnumbered. And as the time rode on, every Summoner died in the hands of many... it was terrible, kupo.”

“Why didn’t the Sentinels help them?” Harry asked.

“How could they help them, kupo?” Moco said, “The Summoners couldn’t call them when they were all attacked in their sleep, kupo. It was all cowardice, I say!” he slammed his chair’s armrest, “So there... they all died... it was a truly a dawn of a new era, the Light Espa-era, because it started with the dusk of the Summoners.... The death of the Summoners, kupo, ended up to the proclamation of the extinction of the Sentinels because there was not one person in Atrynömūnāl who can call a Sentinel, kupo. The Sentinels somehow – er – ‘died’ to memories, portraits, gil engravements, and the like... It was only years later that Atrynömūnāl learned the error of their ways. Now look, kupo,” Moco waved his hand at a cabinet that was filled with plates that had drawing of what seemed to be Sentinels. “Everyone treats them as an unseen force, supreme beings... they are now respected with great affinity, kupo. But one thing that the Purge benefited for everyone is that it taught us how to live without the help of the Sentinels, kupo.”

“Oh,” Harry said, amazed at all of this, “Have there been sightings of Summoners or Sentinels?”

“Sadly, no, kupo,” Moco said, “The Summoner is identified as a Job Class in the official dossier of the Biestavale records but no such guild has been seen, kupo. Though there are rumors of people being a descendant of a Summoner....”

“Can they tell the difference?” Harry asked.

“They can’t tell, kupo...” said Moco thoughtfully, “But it’s a gamble when you make a claim that one is a Summoner... people will think you’re mad, kupo.”

As Moco’s story ended, Harry pondered on the story of the Summoners as he drank the last of his milk and placed the glass on the tray.... It was intriguing and he wondered if there was still a living Summoner at the moment.

“By the way, kupo,” Moco said as he picked up the tray, “Who were those people you’ve mentioned a while ago in Gysahl Plains?”

Harry looked at Moco.

“The part where I yelled?”

Moco nodded.

“Those people are my friends, Ron and Hermione. The three of us somehow parted on our way here...” said Harry, realizing that he wanted to see them again.

“No wonder you were lost” said Moco, “Who is this Ron, kupo? Your brother?”

“No, he’s my best friend,” said Harry, “But after all the things we’ve done together, I think I can call him my brother in a way....”

“And this Hermione, kupo... is she your girlfriend?” Moco asked innocently.

Harry raised an eyebrow of surprise.

“Excuse me?”

“Your girlfriend, kupo,” Moco repeated, “This girl named Hermione... is she your girlfriend?”

It was at this time Harry felt weird at such a sentence... sure it was mentioned during his fourth year but being in his late teens when hormones are more profound, things have changed. How could he feel such a way? Sure, Hermione’s grown up to become a pretty girl but that didn’t mean he was attracted to her.

Well, not that she’s unattractive... she has her assets and Harry had to admit, she has this adorable way when she reads her books... the way her brown eyes dart from left to right -

What are you doing opening that door?!

Harry shook his head out of reverie, a panicked feeling bubbling inside him.

“No!” Harry said, standing up, “She’s not my girlfriend!”

Moco, in midair, jumped backwards at Harry’s sudden outburst and flew headfirst into the mouth of a nearby pot.

“Sorry!” Harry said, standing up and pulled Moco’s legs to free the Moogle from the pot’s clutches.

“Mmmphh!!” Moco yelped in the pot, waving his legs.

Harry pulled him out making Moco fly around, gasping for air.

“Kupo! Next time you deny something, I suggest you keep it in a low tone, kupo!” Moco said, shaking his head in fast pace.

“Sorry” Harry repeated, “I – I just had a weird thought that’s all,” he added, feeling red at his last thought.

“Oh, okay,” said Moco, shaking his head, “But you better keep a better control at that, kupo! I mean, I don’t even know who Hermione is so I had to ask, kupo... and then again, Hermione is a very common name in Atrynömunal,”

“Common?”

“Yep,” Moco nodded. “Very common, kupo. Anyway, I need to get this place cleaned up, Harry so if you could excuse me – You just rest here while I fix things up, kupo.”

Harry sat down on his seat again and started thinking on his last sudden thought...

Hermione has always been his best friend for years... it never changed. He always understood her so much that he thought they’d never argue. But after the recent arguments, Harry began to lose his connection to her leading to a desperation of clinging on to her... he did not want to lose someone that important to him.

But Hermione... we didn’t bury the hatchet before I came here....

A pit opened up in his stomach. He winced and tried to counter these feelings that there were more important things to ponder like searching for her, Ron, Professor Raptor and Accula. He somehow hoped that they were finding him too if they were all together.

“That’s done, kupo!” Moco said, “Do you need anything else, Harry?”

Harry looked at Moco.

“Nothing... er – I have a question though... how many Job Classes are there?” Harry inquired, remembering his burning question from earlier.

“Many, kupo” Moco said, walking to a nearby above Harry, “Here’s the letter I received through mail the other day... it advertises the bulk of Job Classes to join.”

With great interest, Harry opened the paper and read the missive:

The Royal Kingdom of Biestavale

Greetings!

As you read this letter, you have to be aware that you are becoming of age this year because once you turn eighteen, you are entrusted to a life-altering decision: the Job Class.

You are given the privilege to have a Job Class that ranges from the learning of arcane skills and sword mastery. Joining in one of these prestigious classes earns you an opportunity of a lifetime.

You have the choice to become a Warrior of the Warriors Guild, or become a Black Mage and learn the arcane skills of lore, or maybe take up the White Mage path learn the arts of healing. It’s entirely up to you.

So start now and go to your nearest Job Class Agency (J.C.A.) to earn your profession and get thousands of opportunities and all the Gil you can earn!

Good day!

Guy Firion,

Head of the Biestavale Council of Profession and Employment

(Enclosed with this letter is the Job Class List for your consideration. Choose wisely.)

Harry flipped the page and saw another piece of parchment, it was the Job Class List:

Council of Profession And Employment

JOB CLASS LIST

This list contains a dossier of Job Classes, the location of its guild, and a brief description. Choose wisely.

(Be aware that you can switch jobs when the one you joined isn't desirable for you.)

Membership Fee: 100 Gil

Job Classes:

Warrior

Learn the art of swordplay and sword mastery

Guild Location: Biestavale & Gergone

-

Black Mage

The arcane arts of lore are at your disposal

Guild Location: Biestavale & Coneria

-

White Mage

Become a respected healer and protector of the land

Guild Location: Biestavale, Skyld & Ibarra

-

Red Mage

Do a mix of the white and black magic and some swordplay on the side

Guild Location: Biestavale & Gergone

-

Monk

The powers of your fist and feet are your only allies in battle

Guild Location: Biestavale, Skyld & Gergone

-

Samurai

Use the ancient arts of the samurai and wield your way to greatness

Guild Location: Gergone & Coneria

-

Blue Mage

Mimic the abilities of the fiend's and give them a taste of their own medicine

Guild Location: Gysahl Plains & Skyld

-

Alchemist

Be a walking apothecary and sell your items for gil

Guild Location: Biestavale, Gergone & Coneria

-

Time & Space Mage

Study the heavenly bodies and time

Guild Location: Biestavale & Gergone

-

Dragoon Lancer

Master the arts of spear/lance play

Guild Location: Biestavale, Coneria & Dragool

-

Elementalist/Geomancer

Control the elements with mind and spirit

Guild Location: Biestavale, Coneria & Gregone

-

Summoner (UNAVAILABLE)

Take the control of the Sentinels

Guild Location: N/A

-

Marksman

Become a marksman either with the bow or the gun. Your choice

Guild Location: Skyld, Biestavale & Coneria

-

Mercenary

Get paid for your services regardless of good or bad

Guild Location: Biestavale, Skyld & Dragool

-

Machina Master

Learn to use the airship, the car and other electrical components in the land

Guild Location: Biestavale, Skyld, Coneria, Gergone, Dragool & Mog Village

-

Mog Knight (Moogles Restricted)

Become a prestigious Mog Knight of yore

Guild Location: Biestavale

Joining a guild requires you to present your application form, any form of identification and a membership fee to the Guild Master.

We also want to note that joining a guild won't affect your subclass job.

Harry looked at the list with interest but looked at the Summoner Job Class with question....

"Told you, kupo," Moco said "The Summoner Job Class is still included in the dossier but the kingdom hasn't done anything to develop the class because you know why? Because there are no Summoners, kupo!"

"Won't they try to search for Summoners?" Harry asked.

“I’m not sure, kupo,” said Moco, “But they’re extinct and I reckon they just add that there to spark intrigue....”

Harry folded the letter and started thinking... should he get a Job Class? But didn’t Moco already distinguish him to be a Warrior?

“Moco, is it possible for me to get a Job Class?” Harry asked.

“Yeah, that depends if you’re still a Warrior, kupo” Moco said, “Aren’t you?”

“No,” said Harry dismissively.

“Well, then you can enter. How old are you?” Moco asked.

“Er... seventeen” Harry said, wincing remembering the age restriction.

“Seventeen?” Moco surprisingly said, “You look eighteen through my Moogles eyes, kupo!” he then looked at Harry, “Well, you can always fool the Agency and say that you are eighteen anyway,” he smiled innocently.

Harry turned to the list and saw the Mog Knight class. “What’s a Mog Knight?”

“Kupo, that’s the one I want to be,” said Moco, “Though it takes a lot of skill to be one....”

“Are all job classes applied for Moogles too?”

“Yup,” said Moco, “The Mog Knight is strictly for moogles, kupo. Most classes are compatible for every race.”

“Race?” Harry asked

“You know, kupo. Elves, dwarves, Bangaas, Nu Mous, Vieras, etcetera, etcetera...” said Moco.

Looking back at the list, Harry started thinking what Ron and Hermione would choose. He started picturing Ron wearing a robe

and some wizard hat, casting different spells while Hermione healed them all. The thought of them getting a job made him think...

What if Hermione and Ron tried to find jobs?

A surge of excitement build up inside him

What if I can find the applying for one?

"Moco, where's the nearest Job Class Agency?" Harry asked briskly.

"Apart from Mog Village and Gysahl Plains, there is the kingdom of Biestavale, kupo. The main city is a day travel from here when you ride a chocobo."

"Is it okay if I borrow one of your chocobos and ride to Biestavale?"

"Sure, kupo!" said Moco cheerfully, "I'll gladly let you borrow one but you see, I was thinking of traveling to Biestavale tomorrow to visit my father. Maybe we can go together, kupo."

"That... would be nice," Harry smiled at Moco, suddenly appreciating him more.

"Oh, goodie!" Moco started flying around his hut, "Looks like I need to prepare for the trip then, kupo!" Moco said, flying up to a cabinet that hugged the wall to the right of Harry. "Let's see... I need Gysahl Greens, Tents, food, Potions, Remedies, everything! Kupo!"

One by one, the coffee table in front of Harry started piling up with stuff Harry has never seen before.

"Why don't you get Choco ready?" Moco said to Harry, "While you do that I'll be sharpening my knife, kupo!"

Harry nodded and left Moco to do his thing. Walking out of the hut, Harry started to enjoy the environment around him. Atrynömunal was beautiful. The sky was cloudless, the breeze was refreshing and the Chocobos were pleasant to look at.

He also set his mind to knowing that he will soon find Ron, Hermione, Rapticon Sr. and Accula. This became a comfortable thought for Harry.

“Hey, Choco,” Harry said, walking up to the Chocobo that rested in front of Moco’s hut. He stroked the neck of Choco affectionately. “We’re going to Biestavale, ready for another trip?”

As if Choco understood English, it screeched a “kweh” of delight making Harry smile. Chocobos were peaceful creatures indeed. Hagrid would’ve loved them.

“Where are my Kupo nuts, kupo!?” Moco shouted from the hut, “Where are they?!”

Harry made a soft laugh and looked into the beautiful lake.

Wow... Accula does have an imagination... a very beautiful one.

Thus, the world has indeed moved on as Harry continues on in his adventure... with a new companion by his side.

Mini-FAQ

1. What type of Moogles is Moco?

-Do you know the Moogles of Final Fantasy Tactics Advance and FFXII? That’s where I based them off.

2. Bangaas, Nu Mous and Vieras? Does that mean we are in Ivalice? Is the story connected with FFXII or Tactics/Tactics Advance?

-No. No connections to the games. I just added them because this is a crossover of the Harry Potter characters and the FF mythology.

3. How do you pronounce "Atrynömunal"?

-Ah-tri-nur-moo-nal

4. Will Harry meet FF characters like Cloud, Squall, Yuna, Rikku, Yuffie, etc?

- Nope. The FF characters don't exist in this tale. There may be references towards them but they don't have a role in the story. Remember, this is a "HP characters in a FF-esque world" story.

Chapter Three

The Royal Kingdom of Biestavale

The nightly sky blanketed all of the land as Harry leaned against the wall at the back end of the carriage, surveying the trees that passed him, his mind elsewhere as he stared at the trees that disappeared at the vanishing point in the distance.

At front, Choco drowsily pulled the carriage forward. Opposite to Harry, Moco slept silently in a sleeping bag.

What time is it?

Obviously, he wouldn't know since his watch disappeared when he got here to this world. But based on the skies above, he knew it was around the dead of night. The horizon around gave off a mystique glow, the moonlight giving off a bloom effect around the trees, leaves and rocks.

Looking up, as he held on tightly to a cloak Moco lent him for warmth, he saw a bright white circle against a starry inky black sky. The twin moons casted a dominating image above that Harry wondered if this world was indeed a real place.

Thinking beyond this thought, his mind drifted to his next objective in order to find his friends.

A day trip to Biestavale...

Hours before, Harry and Moco left Gysahl Plains when the sun was nearing twilight. They would've left early if Harry helped Moco in finding his beloved Kupo nuts. From what he gathered, Moogles loved them.

Something to keep a tab on... Moogles love Kupo nuts. Survival information, I guess.

Thinking of Moco, Harry gazed at the sleeping Moogle in front of him. It was amazing that such a creature with so much character, emotion

and charm exists. For the past few hours, Moco started to grow on him.

During supper, Moco cooked up a very delicious dish that contained fresh Chocobo eggs ("Just think of them like chicken eggs, kupo. So... they're basically not breathing Chocobo chicks inside... hehe..."), roasted tomatoes and some nice crispy bacon. It was around nine o'clock, Harry guessed, that he ate dinner. It was no different than the food he had back at Hogwarts but it was definitely delicious. It was here that he learned more about the world he was in.

"We're currently leaving the Gysahl Plains area, kupo," he recalled what Moco said, remembering how he gnawed on a juicy tomato. "It's a safe bet we'll reach Biestavale around the time the sun is highest in the sky."

Sun is highest in the sky... how poetic.

Will he meet more of this kind? How much has Accula poured into this world?

Looking at the starry sky, Harry started thinking whether he will find his friends and find a way to get out of here. If only he could find them all and get Accula to magick themselves out of the place, everything will be alright.

Not that I'm having troubles at the moment....

Hopefully, they wouldn't stay longer because Harry was starting to feel comfortable thanks to the company of Moco and his Chocobo.

"Kweh..." Choco squeaked as it slowly moved to a halt on the dirt path.

Harry wheeled his head around at the opening up front to see Choco steering to the right, stopping at a grassy patch close to the dirt path. The yellow fowl squeaked a tired "kweh" in exhaustion.

"Moco," said Harry, calling out the sleeping Moogles. "Wake up. Choco stopped."

Knowing calling out wouldn't do any better, Harry left his blanket and crawled over to Moco, jerking him awake.

"Hey, Moco... wake up." Harry said quietly.

The Moogles finally woke up, rubbing his eyes with his little hands.

"What, kupo?" Moco asked groggily looking towards Harry.

Harry gestured to the Chocobo that sat on the grass patch like a chicken. Moco looked at Choco and got out of his sleeping bag rather lazily.

"He's just tired, kupo," Moco explained, stretching, "I guess we should camp here then," said Moco going to the corner of the carriage and started pulling a very large roll of cloth. "Can you help me here, kupo?" he looked at Harry.

"Wouldn't it be warmer in here?" Harry looked at the carriage's ceiling and walls, realizing how comfortable and warm he was.

"This tent is warmer and more comfortable," said Moco, smiling sleepily, holding the rolled up cloth (a tent, to be exact) under Harry's nose.

Harry helped the sleepy Moco carry the rolled up tent. Moco told him to take it outside where they will set up on the grassy fields.

Leaving the cart, the sudden sheet of cold air wrapped Harry's shoulder that it made him wish for the comfy blanket. Taking a hold on himself, he shook off the shivers to let warmth develop in his body and began to unroll the tent.

BOING!

"Ah!" Harry jumped.

To his surprise, the tent sprung up to its full form before he could unroll it.

“What’s the ruckus, kupo?” said Moco groggily as he freed Choco of its reins. He turned and read Harry’s surprise look and gazed on the tent. “Oh, it’s just the tent... it’s a pop-up tent that I got in one of my trades. Very useful, kupo.”

You should’ve said that earlier....

Despite feeling somewhat annoyed, he felt relieved to know that it was a pop-up tent or otherwise, he’d be using up all his energy on putting it up the old fashioned way.

“Come here, Choco,” Harry heard Moco say, pulling Choco to the side of tent.

Harry placed his hands inside his pockets and smiled at Moco. The little Moogles dropped the bundle of cloth he was carrying just to stroke Choco as the large bird sat beside the tent, lying its feathery head on its side, the neck arching in a curvy manner.

The Moogles patted Choco on the head and picked up the bundle of cloth (which was a blanket from what Harry can tell), covering his Chocobo with it.

“You did great, Choco,” Harry heard Moco whisper. “Now go get some rest, kupo.”

Choco chirped a “wark” of thanks to him as Moco took out a bundle of green and yellow straw and placed it before the tired Chocobo.

“Here are some of your favorite greens, Choco. Gysahl greens, kupo,” said Moco affectionately. “Eat ‘em when you want to, okay?”

Such a friendly soul, that Moco.

Harry couldn’t quite place it but he felt glad that Moco is guiding him around this place. He probably won’t find anyone better at the moment to help him.

Feeling sleepy, Harry entered the tent and found it to be a very cozy place. While not as large as the tents he saw in the real world, it was good enough for three people. Each side of the tent (except for one where the entrance is) had small openings that were used for viewing (like a window). Each could be closed through a rolling curtain which is pulled from the top of each opening.

“Make yourself at h-h-h-home, kupo,” said Moco with a yawn as he entered with two sleeping bags.

His stupor getting the most of him, Harry took one of the sleeping bags and instantly set himself up inside it, lying at the side of the tent. Harry was thankful that the grass below made things softer for him to feel comfortable. It’s been a while since he felt the grass this soft.

Around him, nature was singing its calm song. The distant sound of trees rustling gently with the breeze, the soft squeaks of Choco, and the thought of a thousand other things Harry would like to see....

He looked up at the tent’s ceiling and realized the scope of this world could be bigger than he can possibly imagine.

Will he find everyone he wants to find in a world this huge?

“Harry,” Moco spoke quietly, tucking himself in his sleeping bag. “Do you remember your hometown, kupo?”

Harry turned to Moco to see the Moogle fixing his head on the sleeping bag’s pillow.

“To be honest... I really can’t remember.” Harry lied.

“Oh,” Moco replied without any protest on Harry’s answer. Harry was thankful for the lack of questioning. It began to bother him that he might meet more people who’ll ask about his origins.

“Moco.”

“Kupo?”

Realizing that he really didn't have a premeditated question, the sound of Choco's squeaks from outside sparked the first thought.

"How old is Choco?"

"Five years old, kupo," said Moco, his voice in silent glee. "He's the first Chocobo I ever raised without guidance. I raised him since he was a little Chocobo chick."

"Chicobo?"

"You can say that," Moco chuckled. Harry took a furtive glance and saw Moco smiling at the ceiling. "Through the years, he was stubborn and always caused me some trouble... but looking back, he started to mature then. And now, Choco has become my best friend, kupo."

"Do you have any Moogles friends?" Harry asked.

"I do." Moco replied, "It's just that they all live in Mog Village... I really don't get to see them often these days... I wish I could."

I feel the same way, Moco....

"How big is a Chocobo chick?" Harry asked, not wanting to trek into a conversation that reminded him of his missing friends. "Because I can't imagine it... I mean, a Chocobo is large."

"Their height reaches about half a torso of the average human." Moco explained.

"Oh," Harry nodded.

Moco yawned and said, "I feel sleepy, Harry... goodnight, kupo."

"Goodnight, Moco." Harry said, feeling peaceful in this warm tent, remembering suddenly why he felt cold in the first place.

- - -

While Harry and Moco slept peacefully in their comfy tent, far from every danger they could think of, little that they know that some kilometers away from their peaceful slumber lay a different scenario which opposes the idea of peace and serenity that they were currently experiencing.

Adjacent to a forest that stretched sideways was a towering crag where a long wall sat on the top of the plateau. The walls were made of brick, metal and bronze.

Each symmetrical distant, a small window was placed in a single line across the wall. These windows were used for sentry and defense against anything that might harm what's behind the walls.

Beyond these walls lay a grand city where its streets stood busy at day and night. The city was a gargantuan wonder, covering most of the humongous plateau where the city sat on. Covering most of the city was medium sized houses that vary in design.

From simple cottages to fancy houses, the city varied in buildings. This place clearly didn't have a uniform building design.

Beyond the houses and tiny shops was the Greater District of the city where the classy restaurants, cafés, stores and hotels reside. The Great District can also be distinguished for its abundance of rich families, owning establishments like mansions and estates.

It is here in the Greater District that the late night goers go back and forth because there's always something to do and see. In the eastside of the District, one can entertain himself to a cup of coffee while enjoying the band that played jazz music. Meanwhile in Middle Park, a couple can go about their romantic time within the parks beautiful flora.

While all the beautiful lights and detail make the Greater District a place of interest, what interest us the most is the structure that towers beyond this place.

Towering above the houses, shops, restaurants and such stood a majestic castle. Its design was like no other in the city. Its walls

boasted fine stone from the best quarries in the land. Standing mightily and tall stood numerous turrets that dominated the skies making it visible from afar for traversing people to see.

Like every castle, this place was home to a royal family. The Bedeviere royal family ran the comings and goings of the city of Biestavale through the king. While it would be interesting to know more of this royal family, let us focus our attention elsewhere.

Somewhere inside this large castle, contradicting the peacefulness of the world outside of the walls, a gathering was held in the west wing of the castle.

A heated debate has taken place within the gathering.

Inside the room, a group of six people were in the middle of a discourse full of tension.

“Preposterous!” barked a man in a white beard. “The Sentinels wouldn’t even allow it even if they were alive!”

“Calm down, Olaf,” a brunette woman in her early thirties said, “It was a just a suggestion – and even if the suggestion doesn’t carry out, the operation as a whole must carry on.”

“Must?” said Olaf, fixing himself on his seat, staring at the brunette intensely. “Diana, see reason! We are talking about sending out my guild to the battlefield prematurely. Sending troops at week’s end is precarious, in my standards”

“Olaf, calm down!” said a short stout man in glasses. “But I agree, Olaf does have a point. Commencing the operation by the end of the week is risky and if we are to take action by this Sunday we don’t have the slightest idea if our troops and strategists are ready for it.”

“But as we speak the people of Ibarra are suffering under the quarantine of the Anarchy!” said a handsome man wearing a black suit. “If we counterattack them sooner, we may have a chance to get Ibarra back by the end of Saturday.”

“That is a very deplorable plan, Vector.” said Diana, trying to sound rational than disdainful.

“Then what do you recommend us to do then?” Vector said coolly. “You heard what I said, the town is suffering while we are here feasting away in robes and splendor! We must act now and if the Anarchy were to set a base over there then we’ll be having Von Schneider right under our very nose!”

“I am aware that the Anarchy has occupied the neighboring seaside city of Ibarra but that doesn’t mean we have to go suicidal and barge in like an excited horde of Chocobos,” said Diana.

“Diana,” said the tallest man in the table, “Surely, we all know the risks and such but we must act now. The city is in peril and if we take our time arguing over trivial things, it will be our fault that we ignored the men, women and children’s plea of help.”

“I understand that, Norman,” said Diana, “We should act in a sensible way that will assure us that we won’t lose much.”

“And did I hear it right, Diana?” Vector asked, “That the Anarchy invaded Ibarra under the pretense that they were looking for a crystal?”

“Intel tells us that but we can’t be sure,” said Diana. “Ever since the Anarchy’s first attacks, they’ve been attacking a few cities. Reports have noted their mass numbers but it disturbs me that they haven’t taken a full assault on major kingdoms.”

“Except Skyld,” said the short stout man, “They’ve been getting a lot of heat from the Anarchy....”

The woman named Diana winced.

“Don’t give off regret, Diana,” said Vector, “You did what you had to do... Skyld asked for reinforcements but we were in short of men. They must understand that we have to defend our own people.”

“Can we worry about what the Anarchy wants later and focus on Ibarra?” the man named Norman said. “This is very crucial that we reach a decision sooner. Ibarra is suffering and it will affect us if the Anarchy settles. They’ll be nothing but a throwing stone distance from Biestavale... we can’t let our people get that feeling.”

“Yes, yes, we have to act now, I say,” said the short stout man.

“I agree.” said Olaf “‘Give them nothing but take from them everything’ is what I say. But sending forces tomorrow is fool’s play.”

“It is fool’s play... and we wouldn’t let foolishness be practiced among the kingdom. His Majesty wouldn’t allow it in war,” said a skinny old man.

“The king does not favor wars.” said Vector. “The wars usually come to him.”

“Right... but His Majesty has entrusted this situation to us, the Royal Council” said Diana. “And as the Council Head, I ask all of you, what should we do?”

“As much as I despise this... we can always turn to the Mercs.” said the tall man, Norman.

“The Mercs?” said Diana quizzically. “Can we trust them?”

“No,” Olaf said abruptly. “While I can’t deny their expertise in battle, trusting them in a mission with much importance is unwise. No... I wouldn’t allow it.”

“Is your bitterness towards the Mercs a product of your niece’s shortcomings with one of their members, Olaf?” Norman asked bluntly.

“I don’t play the bias game, Norman,” said Olaf rationally. “I will not let something like that get into decisions like this. Simply, I just don’t trust the Mercs.”

“Let’s not get out of the subject, my friends.” said Diana. “The Mercs isn’t our concern, it is the city of Ibarra.”

“Yes, yes!” said the skinny old man. “We must quicken our pace instead of babbling inconsequential nonsense!”

“What would you suggest, Quentin?” Diana asked the old man, “Being the wisest of us in the Council, I am confident you have a plan.”

“A wise man once said,” Quentin began sagely, “A warrior can never defeat a Cactuar unless he counts the thousand needles it has.”

The council silenced at this saying, prompting Quentin to continue.

“Before doing anything prematurely, we have to take a breather and count the needles that stand in our way,” he continued. “If we are to liberate Ibarra from Natsi Anarchy occupation without losing a large amount of our forces, we must let the guilds prepare and strategize in no less than ten days time. Yes, it may more than we intended but it’s the sensible way. If you have any objections, feel free to express.”

There was silence in the room.

“I second the motion,” said Olaf.

“Aye,” Vector said, raising a hand of approval.

“Relo?” Diana asked to the short stout man in glasses.

“If it is for the liberation for my hometown then I say ‘aye’.”Relo said, nodding.

Everyone mimicked him and all said “aye!”

“So...” said Diana, standing up. “Operation: Ibarra is a green light. Dismiss.”

The silent room began to burst in noise by the sound of chairs and movement. Ignoring this, Diana walked towards Relo.

“Relo?”

“Yes?” Relo asked, standing up as he fixed the documents in front of him.

“I want you to inform the chief guildmasters – well –” she looked at Olaf, “except for Olaf, that there will be a meeting at the East Wing Banquet Hall tomorrow.”

“Affirmative,” said Relo, bowing down before leaving the room to do his task.

Diana took her coat that hung at the back of her chair and started walking out. On the way out of the velvet room, she saw Olaf walk with her.

“Hmph,” said Olaf, looking back at the room, “He seems to be late again, as usual.”

It was at this time Diana realized their usual council of seven was missing a number.

“Well, he has been busy with some research...” said Diana, “He told me that it might benefit our war against the Anarchy.”

“I see... anyway, at least we have reached a reasonable decision,” said Olaf, walking along side her.

“I just hope it works... I can’t imagine how long the people of Ibarra have been suffering....”

“Don’t be too hard on yourself, Diana,” Olaf said, “It will be a matter of time that this will be all over.”

“Hopefully...” Diana said.

“We still have to rally the strategist, you know.” Olaf pointed out.

“I already have a party in mind,” Diana replied. “Even the strategy leader.”

“And who would that might be?”

“Who else, Olaf?” said Diana looking at Olaf with a grin.

“You mean the one who led us into the victory in The Great Atrynömunal War?” Olaf said in awe.

“Correct,” said Diana. “With his brilliant mind, I can tell that we have the edge in this battle.”

“Ah, yes!” Olaf nodded, “He is the man for the job! With General Jack’s –”

“Jacques W. Grangerè, you mean,” Diana corrected him, “Don’t tell me you forgot about his name, Olaf! His daughter calls you ‘Uncle Olaf’ for Bahamut’s sake!”

“Pardon my memory, Diana,” said Olaf apologetically, “It’s late and I’m growing old now, but I must be frank, I’ll never forget that Jacques’ daughter calls me ‘Uncle Olaf’!”

“Speaking of which, I better go check on her,” said Diana, “She asked if she could borrow a book from me.”

“Ah, the little bookworm,” said Olaf. “She’ll never change...”

We leave these two subjects to their business after hearing a name that was so different yet so familiar....

- - -

“Harry...”

Harry shrugged and closed his eyes tight. He didn’t want to wake up to another day of school. All he wanted to do is to rest in the dormitory and sleep the whole day... he’ll probably only get up during mealtimes if he wanted....

“Wake up, kupo!!”

Kupo? What sound is that? It must be Hedwig... wait a minute....

“Harry, wake up or we won’t reach Biestavale by sunrise!”

Harry’s eyes opened and realized he wasn’t in Hogwarts. He sat up from his lying position and stared at his hands to see he was still wearing the leather gloves he wore yesterday. Harry looked beside him to see Moco looking at him impatiently.

“What?” Harry asked, stretching.

“If you don’t cooperate, kupo, we won’t reach Biestavale in time!” said Moco, walking out of the tent.

Harry shook out of his reverie and got out of the tent. It was still dark but the soft bluish glow that illuminated the sky indicated that it was near sunrise. Smelling the moist morning air, he gazed at Choco eating a stack of yellow and green straw which Moco called “Gysahl greens”.

“There we go, kupo,” said Moco, pulling a string at one end of the tent which instantly rolled up in its original state.

Harry helped Moco set the tent into the carriage and gathered whatever is left in the grassy patch they camped on. Moco tied Choco to the carriage while Harry got on the carriage from the back.

“All ready, kupo?” Moco asked, climbing on the front to control the reins of Choco.

“Ready,” said Harry giving Moco the thumbs up.

“We’ll eat breakfast a little later on, okay?” Moco smirked and whipped the reins, making Choco chirp a “Kweh!” before continuing the trek.

As promised, thirty minutes later marked breakfast for Harry and Moco. While Choco moved the carriage forward, Moco took out loaves of bread and slabs of ham and made a “breakfast sandwich” for the two of them. Harry took a bite and felt a sensation as he found the breakfast sandwich crazy delicious.

A quarter minute after breakfast, the sky was already pale blue with a tint of orange. Harry smiled as the gentle wind massaged his face and hair. It was nearing sunrise.

“How long till we get there?” Harry asked.

“Maybe less than thirty minutes, kupo?” said Moco holding Choco by the reins.

“What’s Biestavale like, anyway?” Harry asked, curiosity piquing.

“For starters, it’s the capital city of the Eastern Continent and the largest city in Atrynömunal, kupo.” said Moco. “Its size also matches its vast population... that’s why most of the guilds are there.”

“I guess not all guilds are in it.”

“Yeah, but the Job Class Agency is working on making every guild be established in the city as possible, kupo,” Moco replied. “Anyway, where was I...? Oh, Biestavale is also the home to the royal family Bedeviere.”

“What are they like?” Harry asked.

“The usual you get from a royal family: rich, famous, humble and noble. For a royal family, they’re quite small, kupo. You have King Bedeviere, his son, Will Bedeviere, His Majesty’s two sisters, Porom and Rosalina Bedeviere.”

“Doesn’t he have a queen?”

“She passed away three years ago,” said Moco. “Tragic day, kupo.”

“Oh....” Harry said, not sure on what to say. “What happened?”

“Natural causes, kupo. Great lost, she was a very kindhearted queen.”

“How about markets?” Harry asked, looking at Choco. “The city, I mean.”

“Markets? Well, the city is a center of trade which makes it a great place for me to sell, trade or buy Chocobos, kupo.” Moco said happily.

“What else is in the city?”

“Lots.” Moco said, turning Choco over a curve down the dirt path. “Airships fly above you as you walk down the cobbled street of the Greater District, the market place is filled with activity. There is a daily fair where people can play gallery games for fun. The Greater District also has high class restaurants and shops. Somewhere around there’s a famous theatre where a group of Chuka actors and actresses portray famous literary works in a play, kupo.”

“Uh... Choo-ka?”

“One of the races in Biestavale... they’re very rare these days, the Chuka clan, kupo,” said Moco, “I mean, they hardly leave their ever elusive village so it’s pretty much a sight to see one out and about, kupo.” Moco nodded sagely. “They’re special too and treated with high respect... I mean, one of their own is one of the more important figures in the whole of Atrynömuna!”

“Who?” Harry asked, taking a bite of what’s left of his breakfast sandwich.

“One goes by the name of ‘Holy Revelàcion’,” Moco answered, “I’ll tell you more about him later but all I can say right now is that his compassion for his kind and other races is amazing and inspiring, kupo. And did I mention? He’s one of the most celebrated Black Mages in the realm.”

“What does a Chuka look like?” Harry asked.

“Yellow brownish fur, small build like me,” said Moco thoughtfully, “They have pointy ears and a wide looking tail, I’m not sure... but I can say they love apples, kupo. Their love for it can be shown in how tasty their famous harvested apples are.”

“Speaking of famous, are there any known names there? In Biestavale, I mean.” Harry asked out of curiosity.

“Apart from the Bedeviere family? Hmmm...” Moco looked at the sky in wonder, “Oh! There is the mercenary group aptly called the ‘Mercs’, kupo,” he adjusted the reins with his hands. “They are a rebel sort of group who work for the highest bidder. The leader, Drake Reynald is said to be a great fighter, kupo. Though, I wouldn’t want to cross into their likes. I’ve heard stories that, if asked, they would hunt down someone as quick as a Cactuar shooting a thousand needles at you, kupo!”

“Er... Cactuar?” Harry asked.

“It’s a type of fiend, kupo.” Moco explained, “Imagine a walking cactus with a face. They’re very rare here but are very common in the desert region of the Western Continent... they make good ornaments if you catch them and – well, you know, gut them, kupo,” said Moco. “Where was I?”

“Er, Mercs.” Harry reminded him.

“Ah yes, Mercs! Thanks, kupo,” Moco continued. “Anyway, the Mercs are mercenaries who work for the highest bidder. There are, so far, ten members in the group... Drake Reynald is the leader and the one who call the shots, kupo... the second and third members are twins, a boy and a girl.”

“Is the order by rank?” Harry asked.

“No, by when they joined, kupo. First is the one who joined while tenth is the last, kupo. On the other hand, among the twins, the name of the girl is Helen Fitzgerald and the boy is Hector Fitzgerald. The fourth is a marksman named Ickis James, kupo. He is said to be the best gunner in the land.” Moco started rubbing his furry chin. “The

fifth is the youngest of the Mercs and goes by the name Elias Vex. I've heard Elias Vex has some controversial relations with one of the military families... I'm not so sure, kupo."

"And?"

"Well, sixth is Zack Briggs, kupo. Seventh is another girl named Julia Blumetritt, she is a deadly master in the arts in of fist fighting."

"Martial arts?" Harry asked.

"Kupo!" Moco nodded, "Julia is arguably the deadliest of them all with that kind of talent, who would want to cross her?"

Harry started thinking about Mad-Eye Moody.

"I can name a few," Harry said, smirking at the thought.

"The eighth," Moco continued, not catching a word Harry said, "goes by the name Tybalt Reynald, Drake's younger brother... ninth is Shen-Ku Yu. He wields ninja stuff and the tenth and the newest of the lot is Nero Simmons who uses his brute strength to fight, kupo.

"And that's the gist of it." Moco finally said.

"Where do you get this information?" Harry asked, amazed at the expansive knowledge Moco has.

"My uncle's friend is part of the Biestavale General Information Committee, kupo. I sometimes visit him. Over there at his office, that's how I learn lots of new stuff. Lots to read, you know." Moco said, smiling, "It's always fun to learn new things, kupo – wait, is that the city, I see?"

Harry excitedly looked up and his jaw dropped more than he intended it to go.

As Choco pulled the cart over the hill, before them was a low valley with a wide plain stretching beyond below and past that, sitting on a wide plateau was the largest city Harry has ever seen. The walls

looked heavily fortified and from afar, Harry could see a towering castle with its many turrets and towers.

“That is the kingdom of Biestavale, kupo,” said Moco, grinning at Harry’s reaction. “Largest city in Atrynömunal. It will take us another fifteen minutes to get into the Grand Gate.”

Harry looked up and saw the sun shining the horizon. Every single detail he looked was full of color. From afar, he saw a line of travelers going to and from the main road which the dirt path he and Moco were on latched onto. He observed the wide plateau that stretched to the left and to the right all covered with the city. Harry couldn’t believe that he was actually seeing something like this....

What the hell....

Choco pulled the carriage down the path and into the low valley before them. Harry watched, as they moved, the walls of the city. It made him wonder what lies behind them. Harry looked to his right and saw at the distance a forest that surrounded the city’s plateau leaving a gap at the entrance way to the city.

As if time has quickened, Harry, Moco and Choco found themselves at what Moco called the Grand Gate.

“Wow...” said Harry looking at the amazing structure.

The Grand Gate was an extremely high gate that served as an entrance through the walls of Biestavale. It was tall and wide enough for an army to fit or even a giant. At the foot of the Grand Gate was a cobbled path that extended from the city and to an inclined plane that served as a path to get up to the plateau for travelers.

Moco directed Choco up the plane, towards the top of the plateau. Harry observed the city walls which were now closer. They were made of a mix of bronze, bricks and metal. Looking closer, Harry noticed guards littered above the walls and turrets.

The carriage went on the landing of the plateau and Harry could see hundreds of kiosks lined up at the edge of the cobbled path. The line

of kiosks extended into the gate and into the city where, Harry thought, more kiosks stood.

Harry looked beyond the gate and saw a wide circular clearing where a large fountain stood in the center. Beyond this littered thousands of houses, buildings and structures varying in size, shape and color. Between the hedges of roofs and towers, he saw glimpses of the castle Moco mentioned.

Harry felt a rush of excitement.

I hope I can find them here. Please let them be here.

“The morning gate stalls are opening, kupo,” said Moco, looking at the kiosks. “Since there are hundreds of people coming in and out of the city at the Grand Gate, it has become an ideal place for merchants to sell their goods. But our destination lies in the trade market which is located in the city.”

They entered the gates where a guard came towards them. A sense of intimidation resonated from the guard’s appearance alone, Harry thought. They weren’t human at all; they looked like lizards with long snouts and ears. Their helmets had a Roman gladiator feel to them and they wore dark blue robes hiding their bodies.

“Identification, pleasssse,” hissed the guard.

Moco took something from his bag and presented the lizard guard a piece of document that contained Moco’s ID picture on the upper left and his general information below. The guard read it and nodded. He gave the paper back to Moco and gestured a three nearby guards to come to him.

“Pleassse, masssster Moogle,” said the guard. “After the events in Ibarra we have to be very cautiousss.”

“No problem, kupo,” said Moco, nodding happily.

The guard signaled the three guards to search the carriage. Harry watched as one of the guards sniffed the wheels and observed them

while the one behind took out a long wooden stick and started waving the stick slowly around the insides of the carriage.

“That’s a Detector, kupo,” said Moco, “If it vibrates, the stick tells the user that there is something fishy going on.”

“Who are they, anyway? And why do they call you ‘master Moogle’?” Harry asked, looking at Moco.

“Well, Moogles are known to be versatile in the art of engineering and technology. These guards are Bangaas and Bangaas somehow view us Moogles like a celestial figure, kupo.” he grinned.

“So you’re saying that Moogles are respected by everyone?”

“Kupo, yeah which is a plus for me so I can go around a Bangaa filled place without worrying about a fight. Bangaas are rowdy bunch, kupo.”

“I see,” Harry said.

“Inve:ssstigation completessss...” said the guard, “Have a good day in Biesssstavale,” he bowed.

Moco bowed back and told Choco to move ahead. Passing under the gate, they entered the city. As they passed the framework of the gate, they found themselves crossing the circular clearing, a place filled with people, running about with their business.

Harry was surprised to see the city already bustling at this time of day. There were many humans walking from one end to the other, mothers with their children, men pushing carts filled with fruits, vegetables and such. Groups of Bangaas were walking across the square looking buff in their newly purchased armor. Harry could’ve sworn he saw another Moogle. He even saw women who looked very beautiful.

“Those are elves, kupo” said Moco. “They are most beautiful beings on Atrynömunal.”

“You mentioned a lot of races back at Gysahl Plains... can you tell me who’s who?” Harry asked.

“Sure,” Moco said looking around. “Well, you know what a Bangaa, Moogles and a human looks like, kupo. You’ve seen the elves and – ah, here we are... do you see that, kupo?”

Harry followed Moco’s gaze and saw a stout dog-like creature walking on its two feet. It was carrying a basket of bread.

“Those are Nu Mous, kupo” Moco nodded, “they are friendly and peaceful kind. Those –” he pointed towards a group of tall woman with rabbit ears, “– are Vieras. They are somewhat like elves but Vieras are all woman, no men at all, kupo.”

Harry craned his head to get a better look at these Vieras.

“Those guys are dwarves, kupo.” said Moco, pointing to a short man with a thick beard and mustache as they passed by a blacksmith. “Great craftsmen and fighters. One of the famous dwarves in the city is Olaf, a member of the Royal Council.”

Harry looked at the castle beyond and saw its towering turrets dominating the skies above. He wondered if Ron or Hermione were in there.

“Where are we going again, Moco?”

“To the trade market, kupo. I’ll just drop Choco and the carriage with my father and then we can bring you to the Job Class Agency for your job class, kupo.” Moco replied.

Harry sat back and started thinking. While it was nice to think of what he might pursue during his stay in this world, the real reason why he wanted to go the Agency is to check if Ron, Hermione, Rapticon Sr. or Accula were there. Harry reckoned to himself that that would be the first thing they might’ve done.

“Here we are, kupo!” said Moco.

They took a right around the corner of the cobbled street leading them into a large lot filled with shops, kiosks and carts. A banner above them labeled "Trade Market" hung between two poles making an archway for them to pass.

Moco directed Choco around the maze of kiosks and stalls while greeting fellow shopkeepers. From where he was standing, Harry could see the stalls selling many kinds of foods, jewelries, novelty items and something that Harry recognized as a Chocobo doll.

"Moco!"

Harry and Moco looked to their right and saw another Moogle waving his hands at them. Harry speculated that must be Moco's father. They looked exactly the same except Moco's father looked chubbier and the "bonbon" on his head was yellow as opposed to Moco's red one.

"Dad!" Moco called, gesturing Choco and the cart towards his father.

"Ah, Moco, kupo." said the father, fluttering above his son with his purple wings. "I'm glad you came here in one piece, kupo."

"It's no problem," said Moco getting out of the carriage and untying Choco off his reins. "The way here was filled with the Roadies so it was pretty much a safe trip... though Harry thought he saw a Thornberry."

"Harry?" Moco's father squeaked questioningly.

Harry already jumped off from the back of cart when he heard his name.

"Oh, kupo!" said Moco, gesturing his father to the back of the cart to meet Harry, "Forgot the introductions, sorry – Anyway dad, this is Harry Potter."

"Potter," Harry corrected with a grin. "I'm Harry Potter, mister...?" he turned to Moco with a puzzled look realizing he doesn't know the name of Moco's father.

“Mooka’s the name!” Mooka said cheerfully, shaking Harry’s hand. “As you can see, I’m Moco’s father. Please to meet ya, kupo!”

“Please to meet you too, sir.” Harry said. “Actually, Moco and I just met yesterday.”

“He was lost, kupo,” said Moco, “He decided to come with me to the city and find a Job Class.”

“Job class? Aren’t you a Warrior, kupo?” Mooka asked, eyeing on Harry’s garments. “Or are you planning to shift?”

“It’s rather complicated,” said Harry nervously. “I – I’m just glad I finally reached here, that’s all. If it wasn’t for Moco, I would be totally lost.”

Mooka chuckled heartily.

“Ya hear that, son? You’re a lifesaver, kupo!”

“Not really, dad,” Moco scratched the back of his head. “I just did what anyone could do.”

“Good boy, Moco,” Mooka nodded, “My son here is just a goody-goody.”

“He is, sir.” said Harry, “I’m also amazed by his broad knowledge of the city. I feel like I’m not out of place in Biestavale.”

“Is that really, kupo?” Mooka turned to his son. “I’m proud of you, Moco!”

“It’s nothing, really, kupo.” said Moco, blushing a bit as he pulled Choco to a nearby water box for Choco to drink. “Hey dad, I’ll be back in a moment, I just need to take Harry to the Job Class Agency.”

“I see.” Mooka asked then looked excited, “Are you ever planning on getting one today for you, Moco?”

“Maybe but Harry here is the one who needs it, kupo.” said Moco.

“I see, I see,” said Mooka, nodding, “Don’t worry, kupo. I’ll watch things right here while you two go to the Agency, kupo.”

“Thanks, dad!” said Moco, “We’ll be back before ya know it! – C’mon, Harry!”

Without further ado, Harry was being dragged out of the trade market by Moco’s flying self. For such a small thing Moco can really have the strength to pull Harry around.

They were pulled into the street which was brewing with life. Harry didn’t know where to look first. Everything just felt interesting.

Across the street from the entrance of the trade market, Harry saw a shop selling weird contraptions that Harry knew nothing off. Nonetheless, they looked like something Harry would want to find out. To the right of this shop, he saw three women all clothed in some sort of uniform arguing while pointing to a bulletin board which was latched onto a building labeled as Mysidia Diner.

“They’re probably arguing over today’s special.” Moco assumed, following Harry’s gaze. “That place hardly gets their specials finalize but at least they’re good, kupo.”

Harry turned to Moco.

“To be honest, I’m really indifferent in what to do right now... I mean, I would like to go to the Agency... but,” he looked around, “There’s just so much to look at.”

I just wish my friends could be here... I’d do anything to see Ron stumble out of the throng of passersby right now.

“We can go to the Agency later – if you’re not in a hurry, that is.” Moco said. “But now that I remembered, there are nice sights to see on the way so as we go to the Agency, I can give you a little tour, kupo!”

“That would be great,” Harry smiled, “I guess the Agency is our next destination.”

“Excellent, kupo,” said Moco happily. “Okay, the Agency is located near the gates to the Greater District which is a Chocobo ride distance from here... yeah, it’s not a short walk but definitely not a long one, kupo.”

“I don’t mind walking,” said Harry. “How long will it take?”

“Around twenty minutes if we start now, kupo,” said Moco, “But don’t worry, you’ll probably like the place that you won’t mind... so, anyway....”

Moco fluttered around Harry and gestured the area.

“This,” he said, “is the Civilian District, kupo. This is the place where the middleclass citizens live, kupo.”

“Middleclass?”

“Neither rich nor poor but just right,” he said happily. “I’m happily a middleclass citizen of Biestavale since I’m having fun working with my dad, kupo.”

“There are poor people here?” Harry asked.

“There’s a slum area far off from here,” said Moco, frowning. “The Kingdom is trying to fix the slum area by building homes for them but there are complications with papers, kupo.”

“What about the other districts?”

“The Greater District, you’ll get to see a glimpse of it as we arrive at the Agency, is basically where the rich people live in. Anyone from the middleclass can live there as long as they have the gil to make a living, kupo.”

“I see there are no restrictions between district dwellers,” said Harry.

“Yeah,” said Moco, “I mean, my dad and I have enough money to buy a house at the Greater District but our earned gil goes to the ranch, and our trade market business and we can’t abandoned those any time sooner, kupo. Shall we walk?”

The two travelled down the road to follow the current of walking citizens. Harry looked above to see the sun already shining across the city structures. Like yesterday, the sky was cloudless as it has ever been.

Will the beautiful days ever stop?

“Question,” said Harry, “If middleclass citizens can go move to the Greater District, can –”

“- Greater District residents move here? Yes, yes they can, kupo.” Moco said. “Some of them even go here and eat the cheap but great food.”

“Is the castle part of the Greater District?” Harry asked, seeing the towering turrets of said castle appearing and disappearing behind the buildings to his left as they walked.

“Nope,” said Moco, taking a left into a much wider road. “That resides in the Royal District which is beyond the Greater District. The two districts are divided by the Great Ring.”

“Great Ring?”

“Let’s say it’s some sort of ‘amphitheater’, kupo,” said Moco, “It’s a circular amphitheater that descends below for about twenty to thirty rows of seats.”

“Ummm...” Harry winced, having difficulty on picturing how such a structure can be a divider of two districts.

“Okay, let’s draw a picture, kupo,” said Moco, “There’s the Greater District with all its nice houses and estates, mansions, etcetera, etcetera. The district circles around the castle but there is only one way to get in.”

“And that would be?”

“The castle is protected by a moat and a bridge is what helps you get across to the castle, kupo. The thing is – and this is the beauty of the architecture – is that the starting point of the bridge is an outdoor amphitheater. Think of a very large pothole on the ground.”

Harry can imagine himself walking towards a wide clearing within the Greater District and feasting his eyes at an amphitheater below him. From Moco’s descriptions, Harry can imagine a bridge that elongates across this amphitheater and into the castle’s area.

“Why an amphitheater design?”

“Apart from cosmetics, citizens of all districts can all use the amphitheater as a gathering place to listen to any announcements from the Royal Council or the king himself, kupo.” Moco explained. “This is why it’s ingenious, in my opinion. The Great Ring has rows upon rows of seats circulating around it and in the center of that is a wide bridge that stretches beyond the limits of the amphitheater, elongating above the moat and into the castle, kupo.”

“Amazing,” said Harry as group of bangaas passed by, “Hey Moco, where are we?”

Harry realized they’re still walking on the wide road. Now looking back, Harry noticed how busier it is when compared to the trade market’s street. Apart from shops, this place was dominated by inns and restaurants.

“We’re in Tower Boulevard,” said Moco, “It’s one of the highlights of the city with all its high quality inns and restaurants, kupo. You should see the place at night since it’s just magnificent. Oh yeah, the reason why they call it Tower Boulevard because of in this long road, you can have a great view of the castle’s many towers.”

Now that Moco mentioned it, Harry could see the castle from a distant. The view was pretty good and there was something surreal about the ashen gray castle against the clear blue sky.

“Anna!” called the innkeeper to Harry’s right. He just got out of their inn (named “The Spooky Bard”) to talk to his wife who was arranging the flowers of the front window. “Have you seen the glasses?”

“They’re just right below the drawer, Edward,” she replied.

“What kind of job is that?” Harry asked, “I don’t think inn keeping was in the dossier.”

“Ah, you see, those kind of jobs are more ‘independent’ from the Agency’s jurisdiction. But we have a name for them and they are called ‘subclasses’, kupo.”

“I get it, like how you’re a Chocobo Breeder?” Harry said.

“Yep, Chocobo Breeding is not registered in the Agency but it’s a job, kupo.”

“Can a subclass coexist with a Job Class?” Harry asked.

“Yes,” said Moco, “Just look at my dad, he’s an Alchemist but still does the trade market business, kupo.”

“Alchemist? Does he sell potions and stuff?”

“Yes, kupo. He is now done with the Alchemist Guild and decided to use his potions for the trade market. Eventually, he switched to Chocobo trading.”

Harry and Moco left Tower Boulevard and entered a smaller street. While not as big as Tower Boulevard, it was still quite busy. Harry saw townsfolk interacting with each other on all his sides. He could even overhear the citizens arguing about topics like the king.

“– I’m telling you, that royal adviser of His Majesty means trouble –“

“– You can’t prove that Elliot –“

“– Anything can be proven if you can find –“

Harry's attention then went to a Bangaa and a dwarf. With the words they're saying, they seem to be part of the trading business.

"Sixty gil for this piece of rice cake?!" the dwarf said, aghast. "You must be crazy, Ren!"

"Call it my major profitssss," hissed the Bangaa.

Harry felt like he was in Diagon Alley again. Everything was new to him from the store contents, to the people and the things they say. It was amazing to observe everything in the street.

"We are selling kupo nuts, here!" called a plump woman to their right. "All Moogles are welcome!"

In an instant, Harry saw four young Moogles zooming to the woman asking for kupo nuts. Their constant "kupo-ing" was adorable.

"Um, Harry?" Moco said, tucking on Harry's sleeve.

"Yes?" Harry asked, looking down at the Moogle.

"Is it okay if you wait while I buy some kupo nuts?"

"No problem," said Harry, smirking. "And if you need an extra gil," he pulled out his moneybag. "I'm right here."

"Thanks! Just don't get into trouble, kupo!" he said before using his wings to fly towards the kupo nut shop with the other Moogles.

Oh, Moco. You're such a nice fella.

Replacing his moneybag in his pocket, Harry turned his attention to the horizon.

Everywhere he looked, the different races, the different things they shared... they all gave off a certain charm in them that Harry can't help but appreciate the detail.

Everything was just... alive.

A low hum from above made Harry's head snap upward to see a group of three airships pass by.

"Wow...." Harry whispered in awe as the airship shaded him from the morning sun above.

His awe was cut short when someone bumped into him.

"Sorry," said a forced gruff voice.

Harry shot a glimpse of man wearing green robes. While he couldn't tell it was a man with his hood on top, the voice was definitely male.

"N-no, it's fine," said Harry apologetically, "I shouldn't be standing in the middle of the street –"

"Oh - !" replied the man, looking timid. His gruff voice felt weirdly higher as he spoke. "W-well, I better get going, my friend."

As the man left him, Harry noticed how shady he looked... as if he gave off some devious aura. His reverie snapped away as Moco called for him.

"Harry!" Moco yelled from the kupo nut store, "Do you have an extra gil? I'll pay ya back, kupo!"

Harry nodded to him as he reached for his pocket. The moment his hands reached for the bottom of his pocket he reached into the other side and found nothing.

Oh, bollocks!

"Wait –" said Harry, starting to panic, as he started feeling up his pants. "Where is it?"

Don't panic, Harry! Just calm down and search for it.

He turned around, looked at the ground and noticed no trace of his moneybag.

Why would I look there? If it were on the ground it would be gone by now as any would pick... it...

“Up.” Harry said, a realization dawning over him.

He turned to a premeditated direction and saw his target: the man who bumped into him.

That thieving bastard!

The man in green wasn't too far. If only he can catch up to him before he could disappear into the crowd. Ignoring Moco, Harry burst into a brisk walk as he made his way into the crowd.

Dammit.

Just when he was getting closer, the man looked behind and upon looking at Harry, he broke into a run.

“Hey!” Harry yelled.

I KNEW IT!

The thief weaved in and out of the crowd as he ran for Tower Boulevard. Harry had to catch up to him or else he'll lose him in the throng.

“Come back here!” Harry yelled as he brushed off two men.

What's the use of yelling? He's not going to listen to me anyway!

The thief ran to his left, right into Tower Boulevard. After years of running around Hogwarts, Harry was pretty much used to catching up as he was right behind his target.

“Excuse me!” Harry bellowed as he ran pass the innkeepers Anna and Edward.

“ – Oh, really now! –” Harry heard Anna yell after him.

Sorry....

His pursuit with the thief escalated as his target ran on an unhorsed cart, using it as a ramp to jump over the crowd.

Harry swore and walked around the cart to catch the thief running faster now. Taking no delays, Harry ran swiftly, not caring about anyone he bumped pass with their swearing ringing behind him.

The green cloaked enigma ran across an intersection as Harry followed.

Aha! I'm getting closer –

He crouched low as he passed between two men carrying a large pole and dodged a crowd of children licking blue colored popsicles. Harry was already near the intersection when –

“Ah!”

“WOAH!”

Harry didn't know what happened but he found himself facing the front of a Chocobo cart.

“Son of a bitch!” yelled the guy on the cart, his hands on the reins of his Chocobos. He looked gruff, had blondish brown hair with a pair of goggles on top of them. “HEY! I'm carting right here!”

“S-sorry,” said Harry, holding up his hands in apology.

“– Ever know your one-oh-one on traffic rules, Hoss?!” he bellowed.

“– Mister Fenrir! Please calm down, kupo!” squeaked the guy's Moogles companion.

Harry edged away from the scene and ignored the enraged man's calls as he ran for the thief.

No time to argue... Must find the thief!!

He stopped on his tracks and turned. The thief wouldn't be gone just yet, Harry hopped. Wheeling around, luck was on his side as he saw the thief walk down a couple of steps that led someone out of Tower Boulevard.

Harry rushed towards the thief's direction. He walked down and skipped a step and ran after him.

Yes! I'm nearing him!

Indeed, he was. For some reason, Harry thought the thief was getting tired... this was his chance!

The green cloaked man took a left to another street and Harry followed.

"Oi!" Harry yelled, feeling desperate. "Come back here!"

Picking up a loose rock on the cobbled road, Harry tossed it on the thief's back who got a good knockback from it. The thief recovered and turned to Harry.

So you finally decided to face me, eh?

In a swift motion, the thief pulled out two knives. One was white and the other was dark. From here, Harry could tell they looked sharp enough to cut stone.

Out of instinct, Harry reached for his pockets and realized he both lacked his wand and a sword to fight this thief. Feeling his collar getting warm, he looked behind the thief and saw a Bangaa talking to a woman. He was wearing the same armored uniform as the ones in the gate.

"Hey!" Harry called the Bangaa causing the thief to flinch.

The Bangaa guard, surprised, looked at Harry with question. Harry could almost hear the thief swear.

“Thief!” Harry pointed at the thief, complete with armed daggers.

“Dammit!” said the thief as he shot to a left alley. Harry ignored the fact his voice was unusually high as the Bangaa guard gave chase.

Harry followed the guard down the alley the thief disappeared into. From behind, Harry could barely catch the thief’s green cloak whipping behind him.

The thief made a shortcut down the alley and using conventional wisdom; Harry stopped on his tracks and took a route alley to his right. If common sense tells him anything, alleys are always connected.

He turned left and saw the thief pass by at a distance with the Bangaa guard (now accompanied with two guards) following close behind. Harry took another shortcut and tried his best to find a way to the thief while not getting lost.

It was at this time Harry started to lose breath. He was losing energy to carry his armor which was dragging him down making this harder than ever. If he continues this further, the thief will be gone for good.

And I thought I was going to enjoy this city... now I’m broke!

Harry straightened himself up and walked down the alleyway. He can’t give up now! Pretty soon, he might meet the -

Swish!

At the alley perpendicular to this one, a green cloaked figure hurriedly passed very quickly.

Harry, his adrenaline rising, rushed for the thief. Thanking the fates that luck was on his side! This might be his chance!

He followed the thief down another alley and saw the thief take another left. Harry stopped briefly and saw that the passageway to his right would connect to the path the thief went.

Taking his chances, Harry took the right passageway and ran as hard as he could.

Come on!

He was nearing the end of the passageway and...

BAM!

"Argh!" Harry bellowed, crashing onto the green cloaked thief on impact. The force was strong enough to hurl the two on the wooden scaffolding that resided there.

"Now I got you!" Harry snarled, grabbing him by the collar.

The thief cut Harry off by kicking him away. Harry fell on his back and dodged an incoming knife attack from the thief. He got back on his feet and took a step back as the thief started flourishing his knives while on battle stance.

Even without a weapon, Harry was determined now. He has gone too far to give up now!

"Hiya!" the thief yelled as he ran towards Harry.

As if he knew what he was doing, Harry dodged the thief's attack and thrust himself forward on the thief with all his might.

He took the thief by the robes and smashed him again on the wooden scaffolding, damaging it. The thief looked dazed that Harry pinned the guy on the ground, knocking his knives in the process.

"Not so tough, are you?" Harry spat before the thief smacked a small rock on his head.

Harry fell over and shook the crumbs of rock on his head. The thief was reaching for his knives letting Harry launch his body on him, letting them roll across the alley floor.

The thief got the upper hand and got Harry on his back, straddling his whole body. Harry was about to do a countermove but the thief gave him a good head butt.

“Argh!” Harry groaned. Angered, he was about lift his head when he felt a sharp edge slide across his throat.

“Don’t move,” said the thief. With all his focus on the thief right now, Harry realized that his voice was rather... feminine.

The voice of the thief made Harry think that this man was no man at all. He directed his eyes below to see an open seam on the thief’s robes.

From where he was, Harry could see a clear view of the thief’s waist. It was slender and because of the way the thief was straddling him, the seams revealed her clothed breast confirming Harry’s suspicions.

...Why am I blushing?

“Kinda childish to tell on someone, ain’t it?” said the thief.

“Well, it’s kind of bold to steal in broad daylight, eh?” Harry countered coolly, his senses coming back to him. He didn’t want to back down to some thief. Harry can’t help it but he was now aware that the thief was wearing a miniskirt with short shorts under them.

“I’m used to it.” said the girl. Her voice was rather high but there was something mischievous about her modulation.

Harry noticed the girl was wearing a mask with an opening for the eyes. Her eyes were green like his and one strand of jet black hair was dangling on her forehead.

“You’re a tough one,” she said, “It’s been a while since I’ve had a challenge, ya know?”

She took out Harry's moneybag and shook it in front of him mockingly.

"Funny though, after all that work," she sighed, "The running, the backup, the fighting... you can't even catch me but I have to admit, you really put up a good fight."

Harry couldn't do anything but glare.

"What's that?" she said, looking closer, "Are you blushing?"

"Sorry but the idea of a woman straddling me in the middle of an alley is embarrassing." Harry bitterly admitted.

"Awww, don't say that," she replied slyly. "Before you know it, I'll be off with your gil and don't worry, I won't kiss and tell about this."

While aiming her knife at Harry's neck, she slowly stood up.

"Now, if you'll be a good boy, I'll leave you be for you to live and tell the tale about this," she took a step back.

Harry sat up slowly and made sure he didn't make any sudden movements. Who knows what she would do if he did?

The thief was already a few steps away from Harry. Cue to this, he heard a small creak and looked up at the scaffolding which the thief was below at.

Is it about to fall?

Their brawl must've damaged it badly.

"So I guess this is goodbye then," she said. "Don't worry though, I'll make sure we never ever meet again —"

Crack!

"What - ?" she looked up and gasped.

The scaffolding's base gave way, collapsing where it stood. The thief, looking up, froze as she saw debris falling right for her.

"Look out!" Harry yelled, getting to his feet. Ignoring all his senses, Harry ran and tackled the girl out of harm's way.

The two were on the ground, staring at what's left of the scaffolding.

"T-that was close," said Harry, standing up.

Realizing what he just did, Harry shot a look at the thief on the ground. She was staring at him intently.

"What?" Harry eyed her suspiciously.

The thief stood up slowly. Harry was about to prepare for any attack when noticed her knife was on the ground, abandoned.

Suddenly, she finally unmasked herself revealing her face for the first time.

Looking at her face, she had soft features. Her nose was just right and her lips were like nicely shaped. Harry can't help how cute she looked. Her hair was black shoulder length hair which was strapped with a pair of dark green goggles. It gave Harry the impression she was a pilot.

As a heterosexual male, Harry has to admit, she is pretty.

"Y-you..." she said, her voice both tense and clear. "You saved me."

"Huh?" Harry blurted.

"Even after all I did and said to you," she continued, looking both confused and awed. "You still saved me from the scaffolding."

"Er –" Harry said, uncertainty getting the best of him. "I guess I would do what anyone would do...."

The thief looked at him in disbelief and shook her head abruptly.

"But don't you get it?" she said, "I robbed you and mocked you but you still got up and pushed me from the debris! That does not compute!"

Harry scratched his ear impatiently.

I'm having a conversation with the person who robbed me! How awkward is that?!

"I was expecting it to fall over me and you'd get your money from me and leave," she said, "But... wow...."

Now looking back on it, why did he save her? She robbed him and usually, he wouldn't have any sympathy for someone who causes him any misfortune so why did he save her?

Is my moral fiber acting up again?

"Umm..." said Harry, "I hate to break it to you but... I still need my money."

The thief flinched and looked at his moneybag. She was looking at it with concentration that Harry wondered what was going on in her head.

"Er..." Harry said awkwardly.

The girl looked back at him. Her green eyes were striking so Harry thought it was best not to blink.

"What's your name?"

"What?"

"Your name, I want to know your name."

"Why would I tell you?" Harry asked defensively. "I mean, you stole from me!"

“Hey, asking ones name is normal thing –”

“Nothing is normal about this, honestly!” Harry cried, “Awhile ago, we were fighting, throwing snide remarks and now we’re having a normal conversation!”

The thief made a low whistle.

“Oookay,” she said, “I think you’re forgetting the part where you saved me?”

“What about it?” said Harry.

“Well,” she explained, looking unsure of herself, “I could’ve been killed. I’m young. If I died there I wouldn’t live my life the way I planned it –”

“Stealing from people?”

“Let me finish –” she snapped. “ – anyway, everything could’ve ended there but you saved me!” she suddenly smiled. It was the first time she did and it suited her well. “I can’t help but thank you for that....”

She blushed.

“That and...” she looked at his moneybag. “Here... I guess I can’t keep this away from the guy who saved my life.”

Harry was surprised.

“Er... thanks.” Harry replied, taking it from her.

There was an awkward silence.

“By the way,” she said, “I just want to –”

“Apologize?” said Harry, “Look, you don’t need to. All I want is to get this over with because my friend out there is probably looking for me so if you would excuse me, miss...?”

“Yumi,” she said, “Yumi Suzumiya Kusamari....”

“Nice name,” said Harry.

“Thanks,” she replied.

“Er – look, I have to go – I know you’re sorry but save it. I’m not really having a good day right now, alright?” Harry said, “Now, please excuse me.”

Harry nodded to her and immediately left the alley. He really didn’t want to further this situation. He really needs to find Moco. He must be worried sick!

“Hey!” called Yumi, walking up to him. “I never got your name!”

Harry wheeled around her and said, “it’s Harry Potter.”

“Cute name,” she said, smirking at him.

“Ahh... yeah, thanks,” said Harry, “but sorry, I have to go.”

“Wait!” Yumi said, standing in front of him.

“What?”

“You’re going the wrong way,” she said.

“I know I am but alleys lead you out eventually,” said Harry.

“Not if you know which way is out,” she said, “Biestavale alleys are structured differently than other cities. That way, thieves like me are easier to catch. I mean, just look what happened.”

“I know you’re trying to be nice after what happened but really, I don’t need help,” said Harry politely.

“You’re new here, aren’t you?” Yumi said, “I can see it in your eyes.”

“N-no,” said Harry. “I know my way back, thank you very much.”

“Fine,” said Yumi, “Do you know which way is the inn of the Prancing Chocobo?”

“Err....”

“See?” she smirked, “Not even a clue!”

“Yeah, yeah,” said Harry, feeling annoyed. “So what if I’m new? Do you mind? I need to find my friend right now!”

“If you like, I can help you,” said Yumi, “I pretty much memorize the Citizen District by now so if you tell me where to go, I’ll lead ya to it!”

Harry looked at Yumi’s face. She looked pretty much determined.

Can I trust her?

Well, he saved her life so it’s like she owes him her life.

“Fine,” said Harry, “But no funny business, alright?”

Yumi frowned.

“I promise I won’t steal,” said Yumi. “Here’s a deal, if you want to, I’ll just drop you off and you’ll never have to see me again, alright?”

“Hey now,” said Harry defensively, “It’s not like I don’t like you!”

Yumi’s eyes widened, her cheeks turning pink.

“S-sorry...” she said, “I – I just can’t help it. I mean, you saved me so I’m pretty much doing some serious payback.”

“Don’t be sorry,” said Harry kindly. “Look, all I need is to find my friend, Moco. He’s a Moogles. We were planning to go to the Job Class Agency today.”

“The Agency? That’s not too far from here,” said Yumi. “We’ll just leave this alley, take down two roads and viola, we’ll be there in no time.”

“Excellent,” said Harry, feeling relieved that things are less awkward now. “But if you’re going to help me... won’t the guards catch you? I mean, I did report them about you – sorry about that.”

“Nah, they won’t if I take out this robe,” she tugged on her green cloak. “Now that I don’t need it anymore....”

Yumi then untied something behind her neck and with a simple pull, she removed the robe off of her.

If Harry wondered how Yumi will be walking around with the guards on her tail then he should wonder how Yumi will walk around wearing such a revealing outfit.

She wore a black turtle neck no-sleeve tank top that hugged her torso. Over that was a dark green vest that had many pockets.

Now that she removed her robe, Harry could see her miniskirt which sported the color brown. As for her short shorts, it shared the same color as her green cloak. Her footwear was high-top tan sneakers with white lineage around them. Her high socks reached right below her knees. Covering her hands were tanned fingerless gloves.

The last feature Harry spotted was the belt around her hips which had her two knives sheathed, and some packets.

“Much better!” Yumi said, bundling the green cloak into a ball. “There, now that they won’t recognize me, I guess I can bring you there.”

“Lead the way,” said Harry before hearing a large howl behind him.

“WHAT HAPPENED HERE?!”

“Cripes,” said Yumi, “the owner of the scaffolding we broke is gonna have our heads if he catches us! C’mon, let’s make haste!”

Without a moment to lose, Harry followed the thief down the alley, trying to block away the angered yells behind him.

A little later on, Harry found himself out of the alleys and into the busy streets again. He felt quite relieved to see the busy Biestavale again after being in the dead alley.

“Over here,” said Yumi, leading him into the throng, “We’ll just follow the crowd until we reach my shortcut.”

The two were silent throughout the whole time. Harry looked up and wondered if Moco was alright. He wanted to see him again.

He must be at the Agency worried as hell. I hope he’ll be okay.

“Hey, Harry,” Yumi said.

“Yeah?”

“Since you’re a newbie around here,” said Yumi, “Where do you live? It must be tough being in largest city in the realm.”

“Y-yeah, it is...” said Harry, “Er – actually, I just came from my friend’s place. You know, my Moogle friend. He lives near Gysahl Plains....”

“Oh, so you’re a country boy!” Yumi chuckled. “Didn’t know my hero was from there....”

My hero?

Harry glanced at Yumi who looked embarrassed. Harry assumed she didn’t intend on saying that.

“Anyway, you didn’t answer my other question,” said Yumi, “You know, where do you live?”

“Er....”

Before Harry could answer, a loud bang erupted from a building to their right (Harry looked at the sign of the building which said "Javaloooyas Bar".) as a Bangaa came bursting from the inside flying pass Harry and Yumi. The Bangaa then crashed onto the front of an antique store across the street.

"You roughhousing buffoon!" the store owner of the antique shop scolded the Bangaa "You landed on my phonograph!!"

"Ugh...." groaned the Bangaa as the old phonograph played a nine-note victory fanfare song that Harry recognized from one of Dudley's video games.

The doors of the bar opened and the one that came appeared gave a look of great fervor.

This one looked pissed. His face gave off signs of a being torn of his dignity that whatever the Bangaa did ended up being the last straw.

"You know," said his gruff voice, making Harry's heart leap. "It really, really bites when you challenge someone while he is drinking."

It was Professor Raptor.

Mini FAQ

Q: Will Ron become a black mage?

A: It's safe to say that the answer is: "No".

-

Q: If it was a game, how many party members does Harry have so far?

A: So far, he has Moco and Yumi.

-

Chapter Four

Point of Views

“Your professor?” Yumi asked raising an eyebrow “Are you on remedial?” she asked sarcastically

“No,” said Harry “I mean my professor from my school. Professor Raptor”

Then, standing in the threshold of the building’s entrance, was a familiar face that Harry recognized.

“Professor!” Harry called to the figure that came out

The raptor looked up and smirked. He was wearing a tan coat with symmetrically placed silver buttons around the wrist cuffs, collar and hem. Underneath the coat was a beige soldier uniform that Harry didn’t recognize before.

“Harry!” Rapticon Sr. greeted as he walked towards him “Nice for you to drop by” he said as he patted him on the head

Harry smiled. But his smile disappeared when the battered bangaa recovered from his collision.

“You’ve gotssss ssssome nerve to hit me!” yelled the bangaa. Harry noticed the bangaa had blue lineage around its face.

Cue to this, five bangaas came out of the bar holding clubs and some swords. They flanked Harry, Rapticon Sr. and Yumi forcing the crowd to back away making a circle around them.

“Luckily for me,” said the bangaa drawing out a large axe “I don’t venture alone!”

“This sucks” Rapticon Sr. said in an eccentric way

“Get them!” yelled the bangaa

Two came rushing towards Yumi but in one sudden move, Yumi did a forward back flip and landed on one of their heads.

“Ugh!” groaned the bangaa in the ground as his sledgehammer came flying into the air. Yumi grabbed it and tossed to Rapticon Sr.

Rapticon Sr. grabbed the hammer.

“Thanks!” Rapticon Sr. said as he hit the second bangaa with the end of the hammer’s handle. He grabbed the bangaa’s sword and tossed it to Harry. Harry caught it nearly dropping it. It was kind of heavy for him.

“You know how to use a sword?” Rapticon Sr. asked

Remembering his second year, Harry muttered

“I think so” Harry said

“Then lets kick some tail” said Rapticon Sr. smashing the hammer into the ground

Since two were out, four bangaas remained. The one with blue lineage on his face emerged to the other three bangaas and went into battle stance.

“Now you’ll feel the pain!” yelled the bangaa, flailing the axe around

Harry had the impression he was the leader.

“Bangaas attack!” shouted the axe-wielding bangaa pointing to the three.

A bangaa wielding a mace ran forward and swung his mace to Harry. Before the mace’s spiked ball could hit Harry, Harry hopped backwards making the ball of spikes miss him by the inches. The bangaa pulled the mace out of the ground but the force of pulling it out made him fall back to his line of allies behind him.

“Nice reflexes there” Yumi commented to Harry

Yumi then drew out her knife and ran to the bangaa wielding the mace. Flourishing her knife with fashion, she cut the bangaa by the arm making him screech in pain.

“Argh! You better pay for that missssy!” shouted the bangaa

“Harry, go!” Rapticon Sr. said “lift your damn sword and whack the enemy!”

Harry did as he was told, he was expecting some difficulty but the way he held the sword in his hands made him feel like he knew what to do... it was like the first time he rode a broom. It felt easy.

Harry ran to the mace bangaa and with one overhead blow, Harry’s sword clashed with the bangaa’s helmet armor causing some strong impact.

“Hurk! Blegh!” shouted the bangaa as he fell on his back laying there unconscious

“Seeza!” shouted the leader to the fallen bangaa “Grrr... you’ll pay for thatssss!”

The leader then ran to Harry and knocked him on the chest with the end of his axe’s handle. Harry felt a jolt of pain in his chest as he fell on his back and with a moan he winced at his attacker.

“Harry!” Yumi squealed “Here, take this!”

Harry looked to his left and saw Yumi took out a bottle filled with green liquid. She pulled out the cork and tossed it into the air. Harry looked above him as the potion’s content start to spill but instead of liquid, tiny dots of shining green light came out and start to twirl around Harry. It was at this time that Harry felt a relaxing sensation in his body as the green lights circled around him. A few seconds later, the green dots of light disappeared and Harry felt his body to be a lot better than last.

“What was that?” Harry said as he stood up

“Potion” Rapticon Sr. said

Rapticon Sr. ran and with his hammer, he made a full three sixty spin and at the end of the spin he used the hammer’s head to smash the leader of the opposing party to the other side of the battle field.

“Boss!” shouted the last two bangaas as their leader flew overhead and into the ground behind them.

“Psh. Such small fry” said Rapticon Sr. wiping his fingers on his coat

Out of anger, the last two bangaas drew out swords and started charging to Harry, Rapticon Sr. and Yumi. Harry went into a readied stance whilst Yumi crouched lower probably for a jump attack and Rapticon Sr. carried his large hammer with vigor.

They were coming nearer... but then.

WOOSH!

It was in a split second that yellow barrier with hexagonal shapes was placed between Harry, Rapticon Sr., Yumi and the bangaas.

“Wha –?” Harry gasped

The bangaas stopped on their tracks and looked at the barrier

“You cowardssss!” yelled the bangaa trashing his arms “Using white magic to protect your soulsss! Cowardice, I say!”

“I didn’t do it” Harry said and looked at Yumi who shook her head. Harry looked at Rapticon Sr. who shrugged. Harry was about look at the bangaas when a woman’s voice called.

“That is enough” said the voice

Harry turned and his jaw dropped. Standing between two bangaa royal guards and wearing a white robe was Professor McGonagall... or someone else who looked like her.

“P-p-professor?” Harry muttered

“Hold the chops,” said Yumi looking at Harry “Don’t tell me that you were under the teachings of Madame McGonagatt? The deputy leader of the White Council?”

Harry didn’t know what she meant but Harry said

“I-I’m not sure, she looks like my teacher”

“Ah ok..” said Yumi

McGonagatt snapped her fingers making the barrier disappear. In an instant, the two guards came between the two parties and pointed their long spears at the two groups.

“I say, never in my life in the White Council that I would see such harassment from the Krooked Knees!” she referred to the bangaas

“Oh...” Yumi said quietly

“What?” Harry asked

“Those bangaas we fought are from the thug group the Krooked Knees... Ha,” She put her hands on her hips and smirked “no wonder they were pushovers”

“It is not our faultsss, madam!” the bangaa said “Itsss his fault!” he pointed to Rapticon Sr.

McGonagatt turned to Rapticon Sr. and walked to him. Rapticon Sr. stood straight and held his hammer to his side. Harry observed that it must be a sign of respect to authority in his terms.

“And how would you defend yourself to these bangaas?” she said sternly in true McGonagall fashion that Harry knew so well

Rapticon Sr. cleared his throat

"I was threatened" said Rapticon Sr. simply "I was in the bar" he pointed to Javaloooyas Bar behind him "and wanted a drink... I was lost so I came there for questions, anyway, I was liking myself for a drink when these guys" he gestured to the bangaas, some of them who were knocked from battle started to recover "started making threats saying 'are you a bangaa?'" he said in a mock voice of the bangaas they fought "I ignored them but one came to me and said 'I don't like your face, bangaa' then I replied 'I am no bangaa, leave me to my drink'"

"Continue" said McGonagatt

"Then I drank my drink... then one of the bangaas pushed me and threatened me for - I dunno -" he raised an eyebrow "'not looking like a proper bangaa?' Like, what's up with that? Then chaos ensued"

"Who started the fight?" McGonagatt asked

"They did but I was the one who drew first blood," Rapticon Sr. nodded "Yes, one was about to knock the lights off of me but using self-defense, I tossed him out of the bar"

"Then the battle went on?" she said

"Yes, ma'am" Rapticon Sr. said bowing down "And I am also very sorry for the disturbance I have caused in this part of town"

It was like a well thought out script. Harry was amazed at Rapticon Sr.'s calm approach in explaining the events... maybe because it was the truth.

McGonagatt then turned to the bangaas.

"Is it true that you started the fight and disturbed the peace?" she asked them

Harry looked into the bangaas black eyes. They had a bit of doubt and no confidence.

“Well... you see...” said one of the bangaas “W-we were just having a bit of fun”

One of the bangaas slapped his forehead and yelled

“You idiotssss!” he whacked the other bangaa to the head

“Hey!” said the other bangaa and pushed the bangaa who attacked him

“That’s it!” McGonagatt scolded “You, you and all of you have violated the laws in the kingdom. Being said and done I have to say that you bangaas are in quite a lot of trouble”

Harry then felt someone pulling him. He looked behind and saw Yumi pulling him backwards to the crowd who was looking at the ongoing incident.

“What?” Harry whispered

“Let’s get outta here” said Yumi “while everyone is lookin’ the other way”

“Not without him” Harry said pointing to Rapticon Sr.

Yumi sighed and dropped Harry’s hand from her grip.

“Alright,” she said

McGonagatt then raised her hand and snapped her fingers. The two guards rounded the bangaas.

“Now justice have been served, I must go back and settle the problem with the Council head...” she looked at Rapticon Sr. “I’m terribly sorry for the —“

“Don’t mention it, madam” Rapticon Sr. said waving a hand at her “I am new in this place and I hit a rock on the road on my journey... nothing is wrong than it is said and done, see”

The white robed woman nodded

"Your humility will be noted," she said bowing down "I hope you enjoy your stay in Biestavale" she turned to the rounded thugs "Let's go!"

She snapped her fingers and in a flash of light, they disappeared.

- - -

"That was close" Harry said minutes after the encounter with McGonagatt.

Thanks to Yumi, she was able to pull the three of them out of the crowd before anything could happen. Right now, they are on their way to the Job Class Agency.

"Too close" said Rapticon Sr. "I just arrived in this place and then what happens? Fate shovels crap all over my face!"

Yumi giggled at his use of words. Her laugh caught Rapticon Sr.'s attention.

"And who is this girl that you are walking with, Harry?" Rapticon Sr. asked

"Er... her name is Yumi um.." Harry said realizing she didn't mention her last name

"Kusamari" Yumi said happily "Yumi Kusamari is my name, sir" she said

"I see," Rapticon Sr. said "The name's Dimitri Rapticon Raptor Sr. You can call me Rapticon Sr"

"Nice to meet you" said Yumi nodding her head

"Anywho," Rapticon Sr. cleared his throat and kept his voice down to Harry "I'm glad I ran into you, Harry"

Harry nodded. He was glad to run into a familiar face.

"Do you have any idea what just happened back at Hogwarts?" Rapticon Sr. asked

Harry shook his head.

"I can give you the four-one-one on it but..." he looked at Yumi "she can either not be on the conversation or be on it... she won't believe us anyway"

Harry made a small chuckle

"No one will..." Harry said "I bet the people here would send us to the nuthouse"

"Speaking of people, have you met anyone on the way apart from Yumi?" Rapticon Sr. asked as Yumi lead them to the right of the street.

"Apart from Yumi I met a moogles named Moco" Harry said "You do know what a moogles is, right?"

"Of course I know" Rapticon Sr. "who else?"

"Moco's father, Mooka and then you" said Harry "I didn't meet Ron, Hermione or your friend, Accula" he said sadly

"Me either but between you and me... or everyone rather, I hear that Hermione is the daughter of some famous general" Rapticon Sr. looked around "and her last name goes by the name 'Grangerè'"

"I-I heard that too" Harry said remembering the lie he told to Yumi earlier "At least we can ask questions on where she is... after her, we'll find Ron and Accula"

"We need Accula" Rapticon Sr. said

"I know..." Harry sighed

"I can tell you guessed where we are, eh?"

“Yeah, we are in the book, aren’t we? F.F.O.?” Harry looked up at the cloudless blue sky expecting to see the outside of the book.

“Bingo” said Rapticon Sr. “But before I get into much detail...”

Rapticon Sr. grabbed Harry and Yumi by the scruffs of their necks and pulled them into an alley between an inn and a tea shop.

“What was that for?” Yumi whined rubbing her neck “That hurt”

“Shush,” said Rapticon Sr. “Look, if you want to be on this then listen carefully”

“To be on what?” Yumi asked confusingly “What’s going on?”

“Just listen,” Rapticon Sr. said “Okay, before I begin... what you hear is what you see and what you see is what you hear, when you leave, leave it hear... got that?”

“Eh?” Harry asked at Rapticon Sr.’s cryptic message

“He means that we should keep a secret” said Yumi

“Oh... well, I can keep a secret” Harry said

“Good” Rapticon Sr. crouched. Harry and Yumi followed “This will probably slap your brains out but anyway... psst... psst”

- - -

The Majestic Hall is where the throne of the castle in Biestavale resides. The hall was tall and long spreading from end to end. The floor was blanketed with claret carpet whilst the walls were dressed in blue and platinum banners with the royal seal. Suits of armor were symmetrically lined up on the walls from the throne to the entrance of the hall. Looking above, the throne room had the most magnificent chandelier ever with its diamonds, golden bars and its lights.

Another unique feature in Majestic Hall is its glass wall behind the throne. The wideness and the tallness of the glass were congruent to that of the whole throne room. It had the best view of the city allowing the viewer to see the Greater District and the Civilian District.

The glass was almost impossible to break. No simple bullet or arrow or magic can destroy the glass that shields the king from harm. This technology was created by the glass smiths of the Western Continent in the city of Gregone.

Beside the throne stood two of the King's Guard, His Majesty's personal security. If the king were to be in the presence of danger, the King's Guard (or "The Guard" by the general rule) would do anything to save the king.

The site of the Hall was magnificent especially in parties and throngs where the throne would be decorated to its splendor.

This place is known for its historical resonance since the age. It is also the place where the king sits down when he consults with his political duties and such. It is also here where the king awaits the decision of his Royal Council whether the liberation of the neighboring city Ibarra commences.

These days, the public is concerned for the king's change in attitude. He sits in his throne all day in very soiled king robes and his face seems pale recently. His attitude is more straightforward and aggressive in contrast to his usual cautious and calm nature. The guards are also concerned but after a life debt to serve the king till death keeps them from doing the aggressive orders the king orders them... it is unusual.

The king drummed his fingers on the throne's arms waiting for the Council Head, Diana to come with the final decision. She informed him before leaving the room yesterday that a decision will be made in one day time. His faced looked very wrinkled and it was as pale as white.

"Your Highness!" called a guard who entered the throne room's double door

The king looked up in utter euphoria. Was this the time?

“Ma’am Diana Glacius is summoning herself here to bring forth the plans of Operation: Ibarra” said the guard then he went back to his post.

A few minutes later, Diana came in holding a folder in her hand. She walked towards the king and bowed.

“Your Highness,” she greeted bowing “I bring you news regarding the liberation of Ibarra”

The king nodded

“Let’s not be hesitant” he said calmly “Tell me your plan”

Diana then said the plan that she and the other council members discussed that they would recruit trained troops from different guilds to fight the Natsi Anarchy in Ibarra. She even stated that it would be wise to get General Grangerè involved for tactical matters.

“... we also sent a group of spies to verify the positions of the enemy. It would make our job easier, Your Highness”

She waited for the king’s reply. His unusual stare-into-space look which became a norm with his new attitude became present. Diana looked out at the large window pane behind him to see the city below.

Diana was about to ask the king his reaction but was cut off when...

“– the king can think as long as he wants” said a drawling voice behind one of the pillars that hugged the walls symmetrically.

Diana turned to see the figure of a man leaning on one of the pillars who had long untidy brown hair with a matching goatee beard. He was young around his mid-twenties and had a very long pointy nose. His gray eyes looked at Diana with enigma. He wore very thick black robes that made his shoulders broad.

“Scipio” said Diana to the figure “Please to meet you”

The man named Scipio walked towards the side of the king’s throne and said

“You see, Miss Glacius that as His Majesty’s Royal Adviser, I advise you that you don’t hasten such actions to His Royal Highness” said Scipio in his drawling accented voice

“But as Royal Adviser your terms stand to help the king come to a decision as possible” countered Diana coolly.

Scipio was about to open his mouth but then he bent over to the king’s ear

“You see why the nation is in draught of your own kindness, sire?” muttered Scipio in a pleading matter “Others are confusing you when you have other...” he looked at Diana “...important things to tend to”

“This is important, Scipio” said Diana

“She has sent a sent a spy to Ibarra, my liege” Scipio continued without listening to Diana “Who knows? Maybe she’s sending a messenger to the enemy to spoil your country’s plan”

“What!” Diana spat “Are you accusing me of doing something traitorous?”

“Accuse you for being traitorous?” Scipio chuckled “Why would I do such a thing?”

“I just heard you, Scipio” said Diana hotly

“You might be mistaken,” said Scipio “I was just jesting around with His Majesty”

Diana clubbed her fist trying to hold in her patience.

“You know,” said Scipio “sending a spy –“

“He should be eliminated” said the king finally

“What?” said Scipio and Diana in unison

“I don’t want to take any chances. The spy could be a double-spy. While we speak here, the messenger is leaking information to the enemy” said the king in a trance-like state

“You Highness, the spies we sent are loyal members to the kingdom!” Diana argued “they were the spies who helped at the battle that General Grangerè fought years ago. It’s almost impossible for them to betray us”

“How can you confirm that?” Scipio raised an eyebrow “Treason is a common trait in ones heart especially at these times, my dear Diana”

“That is why we must eliminate them” said the king “Diana Glacius,” the king blinked slowly “I want you to call the attention of Drake Reynalds and the Mercs to take care of these traitors”

“The Mercs would do nothing about this matter even if we pay them by billions!” Diana assured keeping her cool

“True” said Scipio slyly “But they will do things if we pay them by blood”

“Blood?”

“They are mercenaries, right?” said Scipio “They’ll always do anything for a kill... isn’t that right Your Highness?” Scipio bent towards the king “We are wasting time, the spies might be miles from here... we must act now and kill them”

The king looked at Scipio and looked at Diana.

“Commence the order now, Miss Glacius” said the king calmly “And that is an order!”

In shock at what she was ordered to do, Diana slowly turned away to exit the Majestic Hall.

She could turn away from this all and hoodwink the king that they eliminated the spy but Scipio will do his best to use his cunning skill to the king... it was hard to turn away from a bad thing.

- - -

"So you are saying..." Harry said after Rapticon Sr. said his say "...that we are in another world? Not in a world that is in a book?"

"Yes" Rapticon Sr. said "Everything you see," Rapticon Sr. touched the wall "Touch" and then he tapped Harry's ear "and hear are all real... this is no dream world or no 'drawing-on-paper' world. Atrynömunal is a real world. There is a soul in everyone in this place so be careful"

"Why would Accula do such a thing?" Yumi asked after hearing the unbelievable story

"He has free time" said Rapticon Sr. simply "We need to find Accula if we want to get out of here"

"Wow..." said Yumi looking at Harry "So you're from another world..." she tilted her head "What's it like in your world, Harry?"

"It looks like this place... minus the animal people and kingdoms and such..." said Harry unsure if that was the correct answer

"Oh," said Yumi "No wonder you were so naïve back at the alley"

"Alley? What did you do? Grope him?" Rapticon Sr. asked

Yumi blushed

"What! I stole something from him and that's... how we met" she looked at Harry

"Youth must be wasted on the young" Rapticon Sr. muttered

“Anyway,” Harry said “Why do you have such extensive knowledge of this place if you haven’t seen Accula’s F.F.O.?”

“Video games” said Rapticon Sr. “My son and his friends play them a lot”

“Eh?” Yumi and Harry blurted

“Never mind...” Rapticon Sr. sighed “Speaking of friends, since F.F.O. sent us four into this world. Expect meeting some people with similar attitudes from your life... since there are four of us, the people we know in life may appear here except they are another being. We somehow added to Accula’s creation!”

“No wonder that McGongatt woman looked like McGonagall!” Harry said remembering McGongatt and the bangaas

“True. I won’t be surprised if we see an equivalent to the people I know” Rapticon Sr. shivered “’Tis a scary thing to know that” he said in a mock accent voice

“Yumi mentioned that Hermione was a daughter of a famous general” Harry said looking up at the sky as an airship passed by.

“I know, one of the pubs I entered earlier said so” Rapticon Sr. said “She probably landed in an existing identity parallel to her real life family since she is related to them”

“So Hermione is okay?” Harry asked

“Of course she is. Don’t go pessimistic, it will ruin a lot if you do. Think of it this way, since Hermione is a known name around here, all we can do is ask questions and find her”

This thought made Harry feel relieved.

Rapticon Sr. then turned to Yumi

“Look, Yumi. I appreciate it if you don’t tell anyone about this, okay?”

Yumi nodded

“Yes, sir!” she raised her hand and stood on one foot “You can count on me!”

“Now let’s go to this Job Class Agency you mentioned and find your moogle friend” said Rapticon Sr.

They all poised themselves for departure when all of a sudden, something that was flying came rushing into the alley and whacked Rapticon Sr.’s face. Harry looked up to see what zoomed by and noticed a red ball.

“Leave him alone or I’ll have you, long shanks!” said the flying figure

“Ugh... did anyone got the license plate of that truck?” Rapticon Sr. said dizzily

“Moco!” Harry yelled at the flying moogle

“Harry!” Moco ran towards Harry’s chest and rammed him to the floor
“Are you okay?”

“Moco, I’m fine!” Harry said holding the moogle away from him “Why did you do that?”

“I saw this man or” he looked at Rapticon Sr. who was standing up with some help from Yumi “bangaa –”

“I am no bangaa!” Rapticon Sr. said standing up brushing his coat away of dust “I am a velociraptor with human capabilities, thank you”

“Raptor thingy” Moco continued “grab you and pulled you to this alley! I was searching for you and was worried you got lost! I thought he was going to rob you” he ended climbing of Harry’s grasp and landed on the ground with a small “tap”

“I have a tank collection and I don’t need more gil” said Rapticon Sr.
“You attacked me and thought I was a mugger, fine”

“He’s a friend, Moco” Harry said “Don’t worry, we are in good hands”

“Kupo?” Moco looked at Rapticon Sr. and blushed “If that’s the case then I’m sorry, sir”

“Its okay” Rapticon Sr. waved a hand “Let bygones be bygones let’s just go to the Agency!”

“Fortunately, the JCA is just down this street” Yumi said bending down to pat Moco on the head “I wish I owned a moogle”

“I don’t own him” Harry said “He’s just a friend”

“I see” said Yumi carrying Moco “You must be tired walking and flying around finding Harry, eh little fella?”

Moco nodded

“Awww... don’t worry, you can stay over here” she placed Moco on her shoulder “You can stay there when you feel energetic again”

“Thanks, kupo” said Moco

“Should we go now?” Rapticon Sr. said sounding irritant “I’m not hesitant to use this hammer I picked up earlier!” he held his hammer to his side

“Alright, let’s go” said Harry

Harry and his new party left the alley and went down the street. Harry looked above and saw the castle that towered over the buildings in the kingdom. Harry wondered if anyone he knew was there.

At last, they reached the Job Class Agency. The building was three stories high and looked like an improvised train station minus the train, the tracks and the maps. Nonetheless, it was the Agency.

“This is the JCA” Moco said as they entered the foyer. The room was small. It had a small ceiling lamp above lots of wood-made furniture

and oil paintings. At the back of the room, a desk was set up there where concerned applicants go to and ask questions.

“That’s our ticket” said Rapticon Sr.

Harry didn’t listen to what Rapticon Sr. said. He looked around to see if Ron or Hermione was here.

They must be here somewhere!

Harry’s heart nearly leapt when he saw a boy with flaming red hair but it turned out to be an elf who was conversing with a moogle.

“My dearest madam!” Rapticon Sr. said as they approached the desk which was occupied by an old lady

“Ah, yes sirs and lady. How may I help you?” she asked kindly

“Me and my friend Harry here—“ who gestured to Harry who was still observing the room for any sign of Hermione or Ron “— are interested in taking a job class”

“Ah the job classes” the old lady then started shuffling some documents from under her desk to the top of the table. She started fumbling while she continued to talk “It is a privilege, not a right and having one not only gives you prestige as a citizen of the land but also gives you defense against the wild outside of the cities across the continent! Why I remember when I was once a white mage I used my healing services for a cheap price and —”

Yumi then bent over towards the lady

“Um, sorry miss but we are kind of a hurry” she made a very toothy smile “So is it okay if you could give my two friends there application forms, please?”

“Oh I’m terribly sorry” the old lady chuckled “My mind seems to be behind these days... now where did I put those... aha!”
She took out a pack of application forms and gave two pieces to Yumi. Yumi took it and said

“Thank you” she turned on her heel and presented the papers to Rapticon Sr.

“Thanks” said Rapticon Sr. and looked at Harry “C’mon”

Harry stopped his search for his friends and followed Rapticon Sr. to a nearby table where they filled in their application forms.

“Name... Dimitri...” Rapticon Sr. muttered as he got a pencil from a can of pencils at the center of the table and started writing

“How about where we live?” Harry asked when he got to the part about birthplace

“Mmmmm... how about just write down Biestavale?” Yumi asked

“What? I don’t get it, kupo” Moco said

“I’ll explain later” said Yumi to Moco

“And if I can recall correctly” Harry said “We need any form of identification... I don’t have any if you must know”

“Use your Hogwarts library card” Rapticon Sr. said

It was at this moment Harry felt like the most ignorant person in the room.

“Ok, I filled my form... what job will I get?” Rapticon Sr. tapped the form with the tip of the pencil

Harry thought the same too. The concept seemed exciting. He wanted to know what is what and how do one job class differ from the other. Many possibilities for Harry... if only he could share this with Ron and Hermione.

What should I choose?

Harry imagined himself blasting monsters with magic then the thought leapt to him fending his allies with white magic. Another vision he saw was him doing Alchemist duties in front of a cauldron though he won't favor that...

Then it came to him... the way he wielded that sword back there with the Krooked Knees bangaas. It felt so easy to use and so far, everyone thought he was a Warrior. They made it sound as if he was a natural at it...

With something so easy and so simple, how can he pass up a chance to join something he is already good at?

So Harry wrote in the application form "Warrior/Fighter/Soldier".

"Done" Harry said "What's yours, sir?" Harry asked to Rapticon Sr.

"Mercenary"

"Nice" said Harry

"Okay, so you completed your forms so let's get on, shall we?" Yumi said

Harry nodded and both he and Rapticon Sr. stood up and went to the counter with their application forms.

- - -

"What are you doing!" cried the man as he trashed around the floor in pain

Holding a thin and sharp double bladed sword, Elias Vex walked forward lazily in his famous laid back attitude which was known by his fellow Mercs.

Elias position was always laid back. His spiky auburn hair however was wild with its bangs hanging lazily over his forehead. He was handsome nonetheless since he was the youngest of the Mercs. His habits may be frowned upon but he is always dead serious with his

job despite his attitude. Even though he is the youngest of the Mercs, he is in fact one of the Mercs that stayed in the group for a longer time than the others.

Elias had the habit to hold a toothpick between his lips and also the habit of putting his left hand in his pocket of his black long coat.

A standard Merc would wear a long black coat and matching black leather gloves with a dark gray turtleneck sweater over it. The black slack pants with the Merc symbol on the right side (a not so very obvious symbol of a red triangle with a black letter "M" on it) were also a symbol of a Merc.

Underneath all of those fashionable attires was the state-of-the-art Mercs technology ranging from thin but strong bulletproof/asbestos jackets, Merc knife, radios and such. The Mercs were technologically advanced.

"What am I doing?" Elias replied to his helpless victim "I'm following Royal Orders, that's what I'm doing"

"R-r-royal orders?" the man said in shock

"Yes, orders from the head honcho himself" Elias said walking closer to the man "Said that you guys were accused for treason of the kingdom"

"Treason?" the man shouted clutching his wound as Elias turned his back on him "We spies have sacrificed our lives to help every soul in this kingdom! And after years of loyalty, the king is accusing us for treason! Madness!"

"You know," said Elias calmly "There are times where it's bad to be frank but worst to be fake"

"So you are calling me and my fellow spies liars then?" the spy said challengingly

"You know what?" Elias turned to the man with a raised eyebrow "I really don't know"

The door behind Elias opened and a taller man in Mercs uniforms came in. This man was broader in contrast to Elias skinny form and was almost bald.

"What is it now Zack?" Elias asked looking at the man named Zack with his brown eyes

"Everyone is waiting for you downstairs," said Zack in a deep rough voice "Everyone in the building has been eliminated"

"Aww," Elias turned to the man on the floor "ya hear that, old man? You're the last one in the building!" he walked forward and stepped on the spy's bloodied body with his shiny leather shoe "You know what that means?"

The man dreaded the answer but he knew that it would lead to his final breath. What become of this prosperous kingdom?

"I don't care" said the spy at once

"Okay," said Elias and with one stabbing blow to the stomach, the spy died

"You know that it's bad to play with your food" said Zack

"What do you think I look like? A cat?" Elias said as he and Zack left the room "Besides, the money is all that is, right?"

Zack paused and they went down the stairs

"A hundred thousand gil is a lot" Zack stated when a woman at the landing below

"What took you?" asked a very beautiful young woman. Her hair was blonde and long. She had very gentle features and her green eyes make her look angelic. She was shorter than Elias but her petite size didn't justify to how tough she was in spirit for being number two in the Mercs ranks.

"I was bored, as usual" said Elias

"I thought you were loitering about the area" replied the woman

"You know, Helen" said Zack the beautiful woman named Helen "We should get back to Drake before anyone notices anything"

"True" Helen Fitzgerald said "Let's go guys"

"Right behind ya" Elias said as they left the building and into light outdoors.

The three boarded a pickup truck, Zack being the driver. Fortunately, this part of Biestavale was almost deserted at this time of day so it would be easy for them to make an escape.

The truck moved forward down the street passing houses, kiosks, citizens and the like. They finally entered a wide street where a large mansion stayed beyond it.

"Check it out" said Elias pointing out the window "The General has arrived"

Climbing out of a carriage being pulled by chocobos, General Grangerè smelled the fresh air. He looked at the mansion where he will begin his work in making strategies for the upcoming operation.

A guard guarding the mansion came up to him and with a salute he said

"Sir, the Royal Council is inside. They are waiting for you"

"Good, good" said the general nodding "Say, my boy, would you kindly escort my daughter back to my residence at the Greater District? She'll just guide you so don't worry"

"Yes, sir!" saluted the guard

The guard looked at the carriage and saw a girl sitting on the carriage. She had neat wavy brown hair and a pretty face. She looked at him with her chocolate brown eyes.

“Greetings, ma’am” said the guard “I’ll escort you back to your residence as the general has ordered me too”

“I can see that” the girl replied smiling at him “get on then”

The guard climbed up the carriage front and whipped the chocobos’ reins to move forward down the road.

We look on as the characters move on with life; Harry and Rapticon Sr. get jobs, the king and his sly adviser discuss things, the Mercs rendezvous with their leader, General Grangerè and the Royal Council discuss Operation: Ibarra and the pretty girl riding the carriage returns to her home in the Greater District.

They may be on different places and doing different things but what they do not know is that a fate binds all of them in one epic setting of light, peace and war.

Mini-FAQ

Q: Will this be an H/Hr fic or an H/OC (Original Character) fic?

A: This is in which is a devoted H/Hr site so... go figure. This is H/Hr. Just expect the usual FF staples in terms of romance.

Q: In the last chapter, there was a part where Moco said there were ten Mercs then he said there were fifteen Mercs... like, what?

A: Typographical error... sorry. There are only ten Mercs

Unexpected Recruitment

Almost a week has passed in the kingdom of Biestavale and as usual the days grow darker whilst the danger grows stronger. At the outskirts of the city, on top of a low hill, we see Harry napping under the shade of a beech tree in a seated position with his back against the trunk of the tree. For the past few days ever since he has signed up for a Warrior job, Harry has been tiring himself day and night.

Fortunately, Moco and his father Mooka had relatives in the city and they were humble enough to give their hospitality to Harry and Rapticon Sr.

“You can stay here as long as you want, kupo” smiled the grandmother of Moco during the day they visited the place last Friday.

Settling in the kingdom was a big change for Harry. Every night Yumi Kusamari would visit them for a little chat with friends. Harry suspected that he was the reason why Yumi made consecutive visits every night. Nonetheless, it was welcoming and it provided a feel that he belongs in this world.

Harry was issued with a basic broadsword when he arrived at the Warrior’s Guild. It wasn’t as heavy as the one he used to fight the bangaas back at that incident but it was an overall good change.

He felt like being in Quidditch training every time training sessions for the job class took place. With every swing of the sword, Harry felt like it was a natural skill of his. He even got high marks from his officers. They liked him so much that they sent him to the Chief Guildsmaster, Olaf Volkof.

At first, Olaf was doubtful that someone fresh would surpass the training records but when he asked Harry to do the following trials which involved eliminating dozens and dozens of barrels under the given time, he was shocked. Harry was the real deal.

“With a little bit of training and some polishing I think we have a new Knight in our hands” said Olaf after Harry showed his potential

A Knight was the advance job that every Warrior or Fighter would earn if they succeeded to obtain some prerequisites.

Rapticon Sr. was also doing great on his side of the cake. For some reason, Rapticon Sr. kept the hammer he obtained from the bangaa incident and commented that it was a great weapon for him. Like Harry, he outstood the others in the Mercenary Guild that he earned a merit of fine performance.

“Wow... I was never awarded one though” said Harry looking at the diploma one night after training

“Some guilds work differently, I guess” said Rapticon Sr. taking the diploma from Harry

From the hard work Harry has made, he decided to get away from it all and find peace within himself. It was at this time that napping at the outskirts of the city was a great idea for Harry with all the fresh air and surrounding, what could be better than to sleep here?

Harry shifted in his sleeping position and stretched his arms forward. He stretched them and brought them to his lap where a piece of parchment lay. The piece of parchment looked official and the letter stated a lot of things that made Harry rethink what he has done:

Biestavale Royal Council

Biestavale

Dear Mr. Potter,

Some miles away the city of Ibarra is at the mercy of the kingdom's adversary; the Natsi Anarchy. This should be a concern to you for the city of Ibarra has been a humble ally to us especially during the Great Atrynömunal War a decade ago.

It is our duty to help our comrades and fight back the enemy.

Saying this, the kingdom is recruiting the best meaning you and a vast number of selected members from each and every guild in the city to fight against the Anarchy force. You are to undergo strict training in preparation of this operation under you Chief Guildsmaster.

Equipment and other peripherals will be provided by the kingdom's Royal Army through your Guild Officers.

We hope for the best that everyone involved in this operation will cooperate for the best results.

Sincerely,

Diana Glacius

Royal Council Head

This letter alone made Harry feel a gaping hole in his stomach. The concept of jobs was fun and all but he never knew that joining one would also get you involved in war. The thought was almost nerve-racking.

Apparently, his fellow swordsmen, Rapticon Sr. and other guilds received the same letter days ago causing a stir amongst the city. For months, the kingdom of Biestavale hasn't taken any action towards the occupation of Ibarra and finally the kingdom is answering the call. Ibarra will be liberated.

The letters were sent two days prior to Harry and Rapticon Sr.'s application to the job classes. Such a coincidence it was.

Since then Harry didn't feel right... first, he hasn't seen any sign of Hermione or Ron and secondly, he has this feeling that he might not make it in the operation. He could back out but that would be treason to the kingdom and after listening to Olaf's lecture about treason Harry couldn't imagine how he will get out of this.

"Hey!"

Harry woke up with a start. He gasped and turned to see Yumi leaning on the tree on her shoulders. She wore a smirk on her face that could mean...

"Your not gonna ask me about who Hermione is again, are you?" Harry said groggily

Ever since settling in the city, Yumi has been asking about Hermione's character and who she really is. This didn't bother Harry but the fact that he hasn't Yumi that Hermione isn't really his girlfriend makes him have that familiar feeling of guilt in him.

"No..." she said moving in front of him "I came here to see how you were doing"

"Oh" said Harry "How did you now I was here?"

Yumi sighed

"I saw you leave after lunch and decided to see where you were going. I saw you went here but I decided not to disturb your beauty sleep"

Harry yawned

"Man, have you looked at yourself lately?" Yumi placed her hands on her slender waist

"No" said Harry through a yawn "I'm too busy for that and for your information, I'm going to war in two days mind you"

"I know" said Yumi bending down to him with her two hands on her knees "It's such a bummer for you, huh?"

"Yeah" said Harry "What brings you here, by the way?"

"Oh," Yumi said with realization "I – um... oh yeah! I came here to tell you that Rapticon Sr. is calling you back at Moco's place. He says he doesn't want you to be late for your next training session"

Harry nodded, stood up and with Yumi, they walked back to the city.

- - -

“Harry!” Rapticon Sr. greeted as Harry and Yumi entered the house minutes later.

The Mooka’s brother’s house was just like any ordinary house in the city. The furniture was filled with woodwork and the floor was carpet tiled for the moogle’s delight.

“Hey,” Harry replied “Why did you call me?”

“Sit down, sit down” said Rapticon Sr. as he offered a seat in the dining table where he sat “Apparently, this whole operation is going to be spearheaded by J.W. Grangerè”

The name sparked interest to Harry.

“General Grangerè?” Harry said feeling a bit of adrenaline in his stomach “Isn’t he Hermione’s father in Atrynömunal?”

“Yep,” said Rapticon Sr. “and to add to the good news, he will brief the whole army tonight on Operation: Ibarra...” he smiled at Harry “There is a possibility that we might find Hermione at the conference”

“Just hold a sec over there, mister” Yumi said “I know you two are from different dimensions but remember that Hermione will probably be in tight security. You can’t just walk up to her and say ‘hi’. Her popularity is a concern to her father”

“Really?” Harry said amazed at the information

“If your friend sees you, she’ll probably allow you to speak to her” Yumi concluded rather lamely

“I hope she does” Harry said “I still owe her an apology”

“Eh?” Yumi and Rapticon Sr. asked in unison

“Well, before we” he pointed to Rapticon Sr. and himself “went into this place, me and Hermione got into a fight and until now, I haven’t got a chance to say sorry for my attitude to her”

“Damn...” Rapticon Sr. rubbed his chin “Do you think she’ll be happy to see ya?”

Harry didn’t want to think about that

“Please don’t say that” Yumi said

Harry looked at Yumi who was leaning on the wall

“Why not?” Harry asked

“I-I...” Yumi said before she blushed a bit and frowned “Let’s say that fighting with friends is a personal thing with me” she bowed her head down and rubbed the floor with her shoes

“Ah ok,” Harry said leaving Yumi to her thoughts “So, what time does the briefing start?”

“Six o’clock in the evening, Biestavale Castle Auditorium” he replied taking out a letter and read it “Attire; guild attire and it also states that you should report to your guild locations at five o’clock”

“Okay, anything else?”

“Nothing...” Rapticon Sr. said “But there is a sale at the Biestavale general merchandise shops at the Greater District in this newspaper” he took out a newspaper from a nearby stand “Fifty Percent Off of Your Money! Tch, the bastards”

“The who, kupo?”

Moco came down the stair carrying a basket of kupo nuts.

“Nothing,” Yumi said walking to Moco “Rapticon Sr. is just being himself as usual”

“Oh,” Moco said and saw Harry “Kupo! Harry, you’re back!”

Moco fluttered to the table and started feasting on his kupo nuts

“Are there any details you can tell to us about General Grangerè?” Harry said as he scratched the ears of Moco affectionately

“Nothing,” Yumi shook her head “except he has this big shot military associate who is famous for the line ‘My name is Zeiji. I’m about kicking ass, I’m about great vocations and we’re about saving nations’. Zeiji Hildasan is known to others as ‘the Bull’ since he can be very, very strict”

“Oooh, classy” Rapticon Sr. said smirking

“He may be a bit extreme at times but he does kick ass” Yumi said making a roundhouse kick expertly

“Any details apart from him?” Harry said

“General Grangerè is overprotective of his daughter, kupo” Moco said taking a brief pause from his kupo nut fest.

During the days prior to this one, Harry revealed to Moco that he, Rapticon Sr. and three of his missing friends were from another world. The news for Moco was the most “kupo” story he ever heard. He took it well, though and promised that he will try to find a way to help him back to his own world. Though, Moco started thinking that aliens exist.

“Atrynömunal is filled with a full cast of uncanny people, what more could you ask for!” Rapticon Sr. said hysterically in response to Moco’s alien theory during the night when Harry revealed his true identity to Moco.

“Being overprotective for your children is a common trait for a father” said Rapticon Sr. wryly “It’s true since I am one”

There was a slight pause.

“How many children does the general have?” Harry asked trying to get some things clarified

“One, kupo” said Moco “Hermione Jane Grangerè. She’s very popular for her kindness and active role to help the people of the kingdom... she’s kinda pretty too, kupo”

Harry imagined Hermione back at the Yule Ball. Perhaps she’ll be as pretty as that? What is he thinking? Hermione has been identified as pretty ever since she hit puberty.

That kind of sounded wrong.

“And one more thing” Yumi said, sitting on one of the stools around the house “The guy goes bonkers, negatively, over the name ‘Rivoneld Isilion””

“Who’s that?” Harry asked

Cue to what Harry said, Yumi walked slowly towards Harry with a finger on her lower lip as if she was thinking of something.

“Rivoreld... hmmm... how can I put it this way? Got it!” she snapped her fingers as she pulled to a stop “Let’s say that Rivoreld is probably the most controversial character in the Great Atrynömunal War ten years ago”

“How controversial?” Rapticon Sr. asked

“To the point that he was the right-hand ‘boy’ of Sir Alan Von Schneider, the main villain of the war, kupo” Moco said trying to open a kupo nut with difficulty

“Boy?” Harry asked as he took the kupo nut from Moco and cracked it open for him

“‘Boy’ meaning that he was only ten years old” Yumi stated sitting on the table “And he was a controversial figure because he was the youngest general in the world and the fact that he was able to beat

General Grangerè, one of the history's best generals, made the general loath the boy even more..."

"Hold on" said Rapticon Sr. standing up "He lead an army?"

"Yep," said Yumi swinging her legs slightly "He was a genius in the art of strategy and was the reason why Biestavale is settled at the edge of a large lake..."

"And that's bad because?" Harry asked

"Let's say that huge piece of lake used to be the Military and Industrial Districts of the kingdom, kupo"

"What?" Harry said, surprised "How did he do that?"

"The answer to that leads to the reason why he was a threat back then... he used the ancient art of the Summoners" Yumi said smiling sadly

"You mean..." Rapticon Sr. said in awe "he was a —"

"It is not clarified," Yumi cut him off "but what he did to the city sparked a lot of people to say that he is a Summoner"

"What did he do exactly?" Harry asked

"He summoned the Sentinel Ultima... or what we thought was Ultima. It is debatable to say that there was probably an airship hidden upon the skies with a big weapon that could cause the destruction... but some people would say that it could be a Sentinel but who knows? Summoners are extinct and the rumored descendants are running around the land unknown of their origin"

Yumi then ended with a sigh

"How did the war ended?" Rapticon Sr. asked

"During the final battle here" she pointed at the ground "A year has passed since the city was destroyed by Rivoreld and his army. The

battle took about a week to finish since the enemy was out there” she pointed at the distance “and the good guys were in here” she pointed at the ground again

“The battle was won however when the news of the mysterious death of Rivoreld came upon the kingdom, kupo” Moco said in an instant

“Death?” Harry and Rapticon Sr. asked

“Death, kupo” Moco continued “When the battle reached inside the kingdom where the forces of the city and Allan Von Schneider clashed, Rivoreld and his band of black mages broke into the castle and started killing everybody... they reached the throne room where King Bedeviere was but the moment Rivoreld was about kill the king, something happened, kupo”

Before Harry could ask what it was, Yumi said

“He was betrayed... by his best friend who fought with him in the war. He goes by the name James P. Retto, a person known to many as the hero of the war”

“Kupo, he was a legendary knight, you see” Moco said “He killed Rivoreld in one blow and in a final attempt to kill the king, Rivoreld commanded his brigade to attack the king but James was able to fend them off, kupo”

“When the news of Rivoreld’s death came to Alan Von Schneider, he knew the battle was lost and fled the battlefield” Yumi sighed “James was awarded with many honors and also the youngest hero of Atrynömunal, he was only a young boy when he joined Rivoreld’s Youth Brigade which composes of young strong warriors and mages under his command

“The coming years followed which was dubbed as ‘the Peace’. The remaining kingdoms who still had the strength in them united and formed the ‘United Coalition of Nations’ abbreviated to UCN. Their mission is to rid the land of the Anarchy and James, General Grangerè and Olaf eliminated or captured any remnants of the Natsi Anarchy. No sign of Alan Von Schneider was found during the

search... some say he died during the battle ten years ago but that's a rumor since he was seen last year with a juggernaut force" Yumi looked at the ground

"What happened to James right now?" Harry asked

"That's where one of life's biggest questions came... two years ago, James, who was already in his mid-teenager years, led an assault on a Natsi fort in the south of the Eastern Continent... they succeeded though but with a great price"

"He was slain, right?" Rapticon Sr. asked

"Yes and no" Moco clarified

"Eh?" Rapticon Sr. said in confusion

"Yes, because during the assault, a large explosion erupted around the battle causing loses giving a possible death for James Retto. No, because during the body count of the kingdom, they didn't find James body around the pile... he's probably alive somewhere but I find it strange that he didn't come back to the kingdom" Yumi shrugged

"So he's alive then?" Harry said "His body isn't found, right?"

"Yes but the fact that the explosion might've shriveled his body is a possibility, kupo" Moco said

"And what of Alan Von Shneider?" Rapticon Sr. asked

"He is at large as ever" said Yumi "Last year he has declared war again with the kingdom and its allies and threatens every neutral territories that 'he is coming with an iron fist'. There isn't an all-out war yet. But the City of Airships AKA Skyld where 'airships rule the skies' have been having skirmishes against the Natsi Anarchy around the Western Continent and it's been going on for months now... it's only a matter of time till Biestavale starts their side of the war and liberate Ibarra"

“Speaking of Ibarra,” said Rapticon Sr. standing up “I think we better go back to our guilds and continue training”

“Yeah, you’re right” Harry said standing up “See ya guys”

“Bye” Moco said biting off a kupo nut

- - -

“You’re late, Harry” said Rapticon Sr. as Harry entered the entrance hall of the Biestavale Castle

“Sorry, I got a bit lost following my guild going here” replied Harry
“Let’s do this then”

They went down the elegant hall. Harry was amazed at the castle’s architecture.

“Glad thing you arrived on time” Rapticon Sr. checked his watch, it was five fifty-five in the evening “The briefing is about to start... I came out here to see if you arrived”

“Thanks” Harry brushed the sleeve of his formal red uniform with his hand

Harry followed Rapticon Sr. beyond two double oak doors which lead them to a large hall filled with chattering people, all from different guilds. Harry could see people in navy blue robes which Moco identified days ago as Black Mages. A large group of people wore white robes and they looked somehow heavenly, remembering what Moco said, he recognized them as the White Mages. To the far left were Bangaas who were wearing roman-like helmets symbolizing that they were the Elite Dragoons.

At the end of the hall was a wide space of wall that had the map of what seem to be Atrynömunal. An elevated platform hugged the same wall where several generals and important-looking people conversed. Harry wondered if General Grangerè was there.

“Keep an eye out for Hermione” Rapticon Sr. whispered

Harry nodded and scanned the platform from afar... unfortunately, there were no signs of a young female.

"I can't find her" Harry said after a few minutes of looking around

"Shh! It's starting" Rapticon Sr. shushed

The lights in the room dimmed down leaving the spotlights above open for the elevated platform.

"We would like the audience to kindly sit down" said a spokesperson from the stage

The crowd, Harry and Rapticon Sr. sat down on chairs that were symmetrically aligned in the room.

"Before we start the briefing let us allow a representative from the Royal Council to say a brief introduction for tonight's events... Now presenting, Miss Diana Glacius"

A woman went up the center podium on the elevated platform and cleared her throat

"Good evening everyone," she announced "For those who don't me I am Diana Ayess Glacius, Council Head of the Royal Council and tonight, Biestavale's most celebrated commander; General J.W. Grangerè will 'entertain' you for tonight's briefing regarding Operation: Ibarra"

She cleared her throat quietly and continued

"As you all know, the neighboring city of Ibarra which lies on the shores of the northwestern peninsula of the Eastern Continent is under the mercy of the growing army the Natsi Anarchy. The army is rumored to be under the power of the kingdom's former enemy; Sir Alan Von Schneider. It is safe to say that he has returned in full force but it is a must to clarify that we will be at war very soon. Our allies like the city of Skyld are at the moment having struggles with the

Natsis and it is our turn to help them. Using the same chivalry we used a decade ago, we can earn our victory once more... that is all"

The crowd broke into applause only to be silenced by the spokesperson.

"Thank you for your words, Diana" said the spokesperson "And now presenting, General Jacques W. Granger!"

With a long applause from the crowd, a tall man around his mid-forties came up to the podium. Holding the legs of the squared surface of the podium, he scanned the room with chocolate brown eyes that made Harry knew that he was indeed Hermione's father.

"Good evening, gentlemen" he said in a sophisticated-like voice "As I speak and stand in this room, there are hundreds of innocent lives under the mercy of the Natsi Anarchy, the Coalition's most dreaded enemy. I am very aware that all of you who are present this evening has trained for the battle that will take place in two days time. I am grateful for your support and me and my team of strategist has been planning the best tactics which will result to a small number of loses."

He cleared his throat.

"To begin tonight's briefing, let me get you reacquainted with the scenario of our operation"

The next sixty minutes were dedicated to slideshows featuring pictures of Ibarra with brief descriptions thanks to Grangerè and his tacticians. From Harry's point of view, Ibarra looked like a town from Spain circa late 1800's. According to the map on the wall which acted as the guide, Ibarra is located at shorelines of the northwestern peninsula that hooks southward making a bay around the area. General Grangerè started saying things about a possible artillery attack from the Natsi and lots of other threats in battle.

"Because of Ibarra being adjacent to bodies of water, you will be transported to the rendezvous point via transport boat" said an officer beside Grangerè "We suspect that Von Schneider is alert of the operation so he will be ready without a doubt."

"The beachhead," continued Grangerè "which is the point of assembly must be secured quickly. If done so, you and your commanding officer will lead you into the city. Your objectives are very simple yet difficult to do"

"As Mr. Grangerè states," said one of the officers "Your mission in the operation is to secure the enemy headquarters which is located at center of the city. Thanks to some spies we were able to get a description of the building which will be described later by your commanding officers. The defenses are out of question since we were unable to bring any more spies to Ibarra for the past few days"

"There will be six teams that will divide you all." Said another officer "The division of teams will commence tomorrow by your Chief Guildsmaster so let us carry on..." he started to look into papers "Ah yes, if possible, you must evacuate the civilians out of harms way"

Harry felt sleepy as he scratched his right eye. He looked at his watch to see that it was already eight o'clock.

"The artillery must be destroyed, however" said Grangerè "If we are to send in our heavy weapons, you must either capture or destroy the artillery to ensure the weapons safety"

Harry nearly fell to sleep only to be nudged by Rapticon Sr.

"Don't sleep or you'll be in trouble" he whispered

Harry shook his head and focused on Grangerè speaking... the briefing was getting monotonous for Harry.

After another hour of maps, slideshows and talking the briefing was finally over.

"...to close for the night I want to thank you for listening in for the benefit of the people of Ibarra and ourselves" said Diana Glacius at the end "Tomorrow, you are to continue your training and at the end of the day there will be the grouping of teams and a representative from each guild will dress in the enemies uniform and show you who

you are facing. Any questions? None? So that concludes our briefing, thank you”

“Over here” Rapticon Sr. said at once grabbing Harry by the shoulder and pulling him out of the room following the throng “quick! Behind this pillar”

Harry followed Rapticon Sr. behind a tall pillar. Their quick succession assured them that they weren’t noticed by the others.

“What are we doing here?” Harry asked

“You wanna see Hermione, right? I bet my bottom dollar (if there are any here) that Hermione will be coming right out of that room with her father” said Rapticon Sr.

“How can you be so sure?” Harry peeked from the behind “I didn’t see her at all in the room”

“I ask you the same question” Rapticon Sr. said spiritually reiterating Harry’s question “and besides, the way things are going with the briefing I have a feeling Hermione contributed to the plans with her big brain of hers”

Harry forced a laugh and looked out. The crowd was still exiting the entrance hall and out to the cold dark night. After a few minutes, the last couple of bangaas left the room leaving the entrance hall empty except for the guards that were facing away from them at the entrance of the hall.

“C’mom” said Rapticon Sr. grabbing Harry by the arm and pulling him down the hall towards the briefing room

They stopped beside the open double doors and heard voices

“That went well, didn’t it?” said the voice of Grangerè

“I must say you must’ve got them into a motivation frenzy” a voice of an old man came

“Now, now,” said Diana “We don’t want to overpressure our soldiers”

“I’m not intending to do so” Grangerè chuckled “Er, Diana have you seen my daughter?”

“Oh,” said Diana “I saw her just outside the castle courtyard. I checked on her every thirty minutes”

“Good, good” said Grangerè “Would it be okay if you tell her that I’m done? I’m going to finish some unfinished business with my friends”

“Alright,” said Rapticon Sr. “Since we know where Hermione is, all we need to do is find the castle courtyard and – Harry?”

Rapticon Sr. turned to see Harry sprinting down towards the castle exit

“Dammit, that boy is excited” said Rapticon Sr. shaking his head as he followed Harry at his wake.

- - -

The castle courtyard wasn’t hard to find since it was the large piece of green land in front of the castle. Harry and Rapticon Sr. were able to find a way to walk across the grounds without being spotted by the castle guards.

“Hiding a bush is arguably the best tactic ever in sneaking” said Rapticon Sr. as he and Harry traversed the grounds hiding under an unusually thick potted bush “Well, opposed to a cardboard box I think its second best”

“Shhh!” Harry said “I think I see someone”

Parting parts the bush, Harry saw from a distance a marble fountain which had an abundant amount of lighting. Harry squinted past the lights and his heart leapt. There was a girl with wavy brown hair sitting on the edge of the fountain. Unfortunately, her back was to them so Harry couldn’t tell if that was Hermione or not.

"Is that her in the blue cheongsam?" Rapticon Sr. whispered

"Yes," said Harry, noticing the dress of the girl "All we need to do is go to her and take her with us"

"Hold on, jethro" said Rapticon Sr. "If we take her under the nose of big daddy over there we will be labeled as kidnappers in a world we don't know"

Rapticon Sr. was right. Taking her with them might cause some uproar around the kingdom since Hermione is the famous daughter of the famous General Grangerè.

"So what do you expect we do?" Harry asked

"We just casually walk to her and talk to her. She'll know us, anyway so guards will be out of the question" said Rapticon Sr. "But how do we know if that is her over there sitting down... let's get closer"

Harry and Rapticon Sr. edged nearer to the fountain avoiding the light so they can remain unseen.

"Cease and desist, Potter!" Rapticon Sr. groaned as Harry stepped on his raptor feet "Dammit, watch where you are walking on, okay?"

"Sorry" Harry apologized

"There you are!" said a voice to their left

Harry turned and peeked. It was Diana Glacius.

"Now ain't this craptastic?" Rapticon Sr. said, sarcastically "Alright, plan B, you grab Hermione whilst I knock the woman's lights out"

"No!" Harry hissed "We can just walk to them... just like you said, Hermione would notice us the moment we go there"

"We must make sure that is her, though... otherwise we will be stuck in a pickle" said Rapticon Sr. wiping his forehead

“How can we tell?” Harry said looking at Diana who approached to the girl on the fountain “Let’s hear if Diana says her name”

“Good idea”

“Your father is right about you” said Diana as she stood before the girl “you always wander about... just like when you were little” she smiled

Then finally, the girl spoke

“Sorry,” she said “I was somehow enthralled by this book –“

“Bingo” Harry and Rapticon Sr. said in unison confirming the girl’s identity

“– that I forgot where I was” she giggled

“The usual Hermione I know” said Diana, giving total clarification that it was Hermione “Your father is done with the briefing and asked you to come to him back at the castle”

“Really? Okay” Hermione said as she shut her book and followed Diana to the castle

“Our target is going away!” Rapticon Sr. said “That’s it, we need to cause some super damage and fast”

Harry looked on as Rapticon Sr. removed his boot from his left foot.

“This thing has some metal which is a secret for Mercenaries’ one-hit knock out kicks. With one good aim, I can take Ms. Glacius out in one throw and –“

“Don’t. Do. It” Harry said “We will get in trouble. Let’s just get her our attention”

“Harry! Don’t –“

Harry stood up, releasing himself from the depths of the bush and shouted

“Herm – !”

Thud!

Harry didn't know why but the sharp pain on the back of his head sent him into a drowsy state. The last thing he saw was the soft green grass of the castle grounds and the figure of a castle guard.

Chapter Six

Operation Ibarra

“...”

“Moco, he’s waking up!”

“...”

“They must really hit him on the head, kupo”

“...”

“Harry, wake up”

“...”

“Leave him alone, kupo”

“I guess you’re right... after being accused for a failed attempt in ambushing the general’s daughter”

Harry opened his eyes slowly and was looking at the ceiling of his bedroom in Moco’s family’s place. He stood to a sitting position rubbing the back of his head which had a feeling of a sharp pain.

“Are you okay?” Yumi asked who was sitting on the side of the bed

“I’m fine” Harry said “What happened? And what time is it?”

“It’s only twelve midnight” Moco said “Apparently, you were accused to ambush Hermione Grangerè”

“What?” Harry said in disbelief “Why would I do that?”

“According to Rapticon Sr.,” said Yumi “You came out of the bushes you two were hiding at and then a castle guard caught you”

“Where’s Rapticon Sr.?”

“He’s downstairs” Moco said “He was able to bail you out – not from jail, kupo – according to him, you were the only one seen. So when the guard caught you, Rapticon Sr. came out of the bushes and staged a scene where you were an autistic boy who thought the bush was a place of salvation and he was your guardian, kupo... for some reason, the guard bought it”

“Anything else?” Harry asked

“Oh yeah, Rapticon Sr. stated that Diana Glacius and Hermione weren’t aware of your presence” Yumi clarified

Harry mentally swore. He was this close to get to Hermione. It was her, he could tell. He got out of bed and stood up.

“Where are you going, kupo?”

“Downstairs” Harry said

Harry went downstairs to see Rapticon Sr. drinking coffee on the dining table. Mooka was warming himself before the fireplace and the other relatives of Moco were just lingering about.

“You’re awake” Rapticon Sr. said putting down his cup “How’s your head?”

“It’s fine...” Harry said “Yumi and Moco told me what you told them so you don’t have to say everything”

“Okay... by the way, the guard feels sorry for hitting you he was about to give out a thousand gil – I denied it though”

“Good, I don’t need money at the moment...” Harry groaned “We were this close”

“I know and don’t worry, we will find her. Just give it time...”

A long silence followed this with the sound only being the crackling of the fire.

“Frankly Harry,” Rapticon Sr. said “and don’t get offended by it but you seem – I dunno – desperate to meet her and the fact that you’re not worried about Ron at all”

“If I knew where Ron was before I knew where Hermione was then I’d give the same attention to Ron –“

“Still, I noticed ever since we set foot in here that you are using Hermione as a shield from Yumi. What? A girlfriend?”

Harry blushed.

“She’s not my girlfriend”

“I know, I know. Don’t get shirty on me” Rapticon Sr. raised his hands in defense “I’m just pointing some things out... I know how you feel when it comes to this. Remember the time where Rita Skeeter pulled that media stunt on you and Hermione during your fourth year?”

“Yes... but I hate it when someone points it out. It makes my subconscious mind become... conscious” Harry said leaving a weird taste in his mouth

Subconscious? If it is so then does that mean his feelings for Hermione were there all along without knowing it?

“Look,” Rapticon Sr. said quietly, snapping Harry from his reverie “If we are to find Hermione, Ron and Accula and get out of here, we have to at least survive the battle”

A pit on Harry’s stomach deepened. He had the feeling of dread in him.

“Don’t worry, you’ll survive” Rapticon Sr. assured “Hopefully”

- - -

“Thank you for your attention, gentlemen” said Olaf, Chief Guildsmaster of the Warrior’s Guild after a day has passed since

Harry's incident in the castle grounds "By the way, while I had this little pep talk with you, some officers of the Royal Guard already posted the assigned teams you are assigned to for Operation: Ibarra at the Guild Lobby. That is all, gentlemen, dismiss"

Harry stood from his seat in the Warrior's Guild Auditorium and darted towards the Guild's Lobby which was located right outside the auditorium

Looking at the billboard, he saw that it was filled with lists which contained the assigned teams pinned on the spot. Harry scanned for his name...

He looked around for minutes...

Parker, Hamilton, Koontz, Campbell... no name yet of "Potter"

Then something caught his eye...

Weasley

Harry took a double take and looked at it again.

Ronaldoe B. Weasley

His heart leapt. Ron is here! And he's alive and has a job. But what job did he take? Harry cursed at the lack of job classification in the list. But one thing he knew is that Ron isn't in the same team as he is.

"Team Ultima" Harry muttered, looking at Ron's assigned team "and I am..."

He scanned again and finally, he saw his name

"Team Bahamut" Harry sighed "Too bad I'm not with Ron"

He got to a standing position and started thinking.

I found Hermione... and now I can track down Ron. I am this close to going home. All I just need is to help Rapticon Sr. find his friend and we can all get out of here... if only I can find him.

"I have to tell Rapticon Sr. about this" Harry muttered and in a flash, he ran out of the building.

"You saw Ron! Where?" Rapticon Sr. said in zeal, minutes later after Harry told the news "If he's stuck in a prison cell then we must get into drastic measures, I get some tee-en-tee and you'll –"

"No, no, sir – I saw Ron's name in the list of assigned teams this morning" Harry said calming Rapticon Sr. down

"Oh," he replied making a disappointment sigh "Dammit, and I thought we would be out here soon... I'm not very keen into going into this operation"

"Same here" Harry said dreading of the upcoming operation tomorrow "I don't want to do anything stupid"

"Just do what you were told and follow orders constantly... that way, you will survive" Rapticon Sr. said seriously "Believe me, I went to war once"

Harry looked at Rapticon Sr.'s serious face. It looked genuine so he assumed that he should take everything Rapticon Sr. said by heart. With a nod and sat down on a chair and made a soft sigh.

"Look, you're not gonna die, Harry"

"I'm not saying I am... I just want to get out of here" Harry assured Rapticon Sr.

"We will get out of here soon, don't you worry"

"What team are you at?" Harry asked

"Team Bahamut"

Harry's heart lifted. Looks like he won't be alone in battle, after all.

"I can deduce that your smile means that you are in Team Bahamut too, right?"

"I am too"

"Good..." Rapticon Sr. smirked "Crap, I gotta go make an equipment check and review the objectives, see ya... and oh yeah, I suggest you do the same too. Entering the battlefield unequipped is almost similar to taking a test you know nothing about."

Rapticon Sr. left the room leaving Harry to his thoughts of the upcoming battle.

- - -

Harry ran down the scorched earth with amazing speed. He looked behind him and saw that he lost his pursuer. Wiping his brow off sweat and wet mud, he took a step backwards and sat down behind a bush.

He winced as he tore off his pant leg and saw a deep cut on his lower calf. It looked bad and if he didn't treat it soon he might die any moment.

The sound of thundering footsteps made Harry jump. He pushed himself further deep into the bushes' shadows. Thank Merlin it was dusk...

Harry peeked through the gaps of the bush and saw the feet of his pursuer... the growling sounds it made made Harry's hairs stand up on end.

Harry moved a bit further back into the shadows of the bushes when suddenly...

Tick!

The sound of Harry's hand stepping on a twig making it snap made the creature roar. Harry didn't know what to do as the thundering steps came towards him. Standing up, unsheathing his sword, Harry was about prepare his would-be death...

A clash of battle, a roar then a scream...

"HARRY!"

Harry woke up with a start and panted heavily.

"It was all a dream" Harry said in relief as he threw himself backwards to his pillow "Just a dream..."

On cue, Yumi burst through the door running towards Harry fully clothed in green pajamas with Chocobo head designs.

"Harry!" she squealed "I heard you screaming, are you alright?"

"Hey!" Harry said pulling the sheets upwards to hide his topless figure

For a second there, I thought Yumi was Hermione...

"Sorry but are you alright?" Yumi asked

"I'm fine..." Harry said "What time is it?"

"Five in the morning" Yumi said

"Kupo, can't a moogles have his beauty sleep?" Moco said groggily as he entered the room and flutter on Harry's knee

"He just had a nightmare, that's all" Yumi speculated

"Yeah, just a dream... a very bad one" Harry assured

Moco's brows furrowed. He looked at Harry with concern

"I think a cup of tea would do well, kupo"

“I would do a cup of tea when I have a bad case of battle fatigue” said a gruff voice behind them

All heads turned to see Rapticon Sr. leaning on the door’s frame fully dressed in his Mercenary outfit.

“Battle what?” Yumi asked standing up as she picked up Moco

“Battle fatigue” Rapticon Sr. repeated “it comprises the range of adverse behaviors in reaction to the stress of combat. Every soldier gets that feeling before, during and possibly after the battle”

“Do dreams and nightmares count?” Harry asked

“Yep”

Harry groaned

“Why are you all dressed?”

“Roll call begins in six... glad thing the dream woke you up, otherwise, I’d be up here screaming in your ear to wake up” Rapticon Sr. said in sarcasm

“Okay,” walked towards the door “We’ll make breakfast while you two get ready”

“Thanks, Yumi” Rapticon Sr. smiled

Yumi returned the smile and left

“Good girl, that Yumi... anywho, Harry, to let go off your battle fatigue you must learn how to calm down and clear your mind. Concentrate in battle, it ain’t hard” Rapticon Sr. stated

“But what if I can’t?” Harry said

“That’s why you must learn... remember back at school when you played Quidditch –”

The sound of something so normal (for a wizard, anyway) made Harry want to go home even more.

“- and tried to focus on catching the snitch? Try to apply that in the battlefield and don’t think like a pessimistic. It will make it worst”

“Thanks for the tip” Harry replied “It will help me a lot. I’m going to change”

“I’ll expect you in ten minutes” Rapticon Sr. left the closing the door behind him

Harry took a bath, got dressed into his Warrior uniform and double checked his equipment. He looked around and hoped he would see this place again. After a bit of meditating, Harry left the room and proceeded downstairs.

“What took you?”

“I was making an equipment check” Harry said sitting down and pulled a plate of bacon to him

“Good, got everything?” Rapticon Sr. drank his coffee

“Yes” Harry nodded as he piled his plate with sausages

If this was going to be his last breakfast then at least make this his breakfast of champions.

“You must be really hungry, kupo” Moco said in amazement as he turned a pan over to allow fried eggs fall on a plate.

“He should eat, the battlefield won’t accommodate such delicacies” Rapticon Sr. took a bite out of his breadstick “The only thing that you’ll be limited to are bugs, frogs and possibly, snakes”

“Ewww” Yumi said “We’re eating here”

"I know but it's the truth" Rapticon Sr. shrugged "Now eat up Harry or else you'll be seeing chocolate frogs in a new light when we get the hell out of here"

- - -

Harry and Rapticon Sr. arrived at the Biestavale docks fifteen minutes later to attend the role call.

Harry had dread in his stomach as he got off the Chocobo-pulled cart after his professor got out. He smelled the cold and moist air which had a mix of gunpowder and oil. They're probably going to use boats to go to Ibarra.

"Now, Harry" Rapticon Sr. said, hoisting his equipment bag up "Just stick close to me... you'll be fine"

Harry nodded and together, they walked down the crowded dock which was filled with warriors, mages and other types of classes. Harry tailed behind Rapticon Sr. as they entered the throng.

From here, Harry could hear the children crying for their father going to war. The feeling made Harry pity them... he knew what it felt like to have no father.

Harry looked at the docks to see the boats they'll be riding on. The boats looked different than any boat he has seen. The curved and metallic look makes it a large contrast from the medieval area of Biestavale. He looked on as a large group stored crates and things into it. Harry suspected war equipment.

"Déjà-vu" Rapticon Sr. muttered "I remember the time when I landed at a beach at Europe. Nasty those hedgehogs were"

Harry had no idea what Rapticon Sr. said but he knew that it meant something. He looked around and saw a couple of mages giving each other an equipment check. Harry didn't know why but the mages looked strange. They looked stout, their face was completely black and the only thing they had on their face were bright yellow eyes.

“They’re a species of black mages...” Rapticon Sr. said, reading the face of Harry “Moco said that they are just called Black mages since no one knows who they really are”

The next few minutes was filled with people bidding farewell to their families and more equipment check. Harry and Rapticon Sr. gave each other an equipment check before the last minute struck.

“Alright, people!” shouted an officer who was standing on a platform at the edge of the docks “Attention!”

The throng stopped their activities. They looked up at the old officer with concentration.

Harry zipped his bag and looked up to see Diana Glacius climbing up the platform. She leaned towards the podium and finally spoke.

“Today is the day...” she said dramatically “The day that we break the bonds of cowardice and reconnect the chains of dignity! Our commanders and officers have worked day and night for this day in order to achieve victory with fewer casualties. For your part,” she looked around “you have done well in your training sessions to let your superiors achieve such a goal... now, the hour of Biestavale has finally come. Let us go into the depths of hell itself”

Then with one final glance...

“Show them why we are called the ‘Capital Torrent’”

The final words in Diana’s speech seem to affect the crowd since the throng started cheering and shouting “Hear, hear” in zeal.

“Before we continue” Diana said “Our commanding officers will be here by your side to advise you in the field of battle” she gestured to a line of officers “They will be an asset to our operation... ask them when you need help in battle. You won’t regret it. Move out!”

“What’s a torrent?” Harry asked Rapticon Sr.

“It means a storm or a strong current or something...” he replied
“C’mon... our commanding officer is Olaf. I saw it in the list yesterday”

Harry’s heart leapt. Having his Chief guildsmaster as commanding officer made it a lot easier to breathe.

They proceeded down the boardwalk and Harry looked to see that each boat had a label to them... the first boat had “Ultima” whilst the second was “Shiva”. Harry could tell that these boats are the assigned boats to each team. Harry peered down the walk and saw the final boat which had the words “Bahamut” sprayed on the top neatly.

The rear of the boat was open allowing the soldiers to enter. Olaf was already stationed there waiting for the team to arrive.

“Mercenary Rapticon Sr. Raptor, reporting for duty, sir” Rapticon Sr. said saluting when they went to him

Harry felt Rapticon Sr. nudging him in the ribs. It took him a while to realize what he had to do.

“Oh – sorry – Harry Potter, reporting for duty, sir” he saluted

“At ease,” Olaf said “I couldn’t be any happier to have the best in my team” he smiled “I have heard of your records, Mr. Raptor... and I have to say, I am impressed”

“Thank you, sir” Rapticon Sr. replied

“And I know my star student;” Olaf looked at Harry “If we succeed in this operation maybe a promotion will be in order”

Harry forced a smile. All he wanted was to get out of this place instead of a promotion.

“Well, get in. The rest will just follow” Olaf gestured them inside the boat

- - -

They were on the move. Olaf and two officers briefed Team Bahamut on their objectives. It was like a summarized version of the long briefing two nights ago except that Team Bahamut is responsible to destroy the defenses of the beachhead and that they will be responsible to secure the third district of Ibarra.

Harry sat on his chair twiddling his thumbs. He's never gone to war before in his life and now he is about to face something new and dangerous to him. Sure, he has encountered more dangerous events than this but this is new to him... and the fact that this is what is separating him from going home makes it even more difficult to bear.

The whole boat was quiet. No one spoke to each other. Not a single a soul thought of anything but the mission. It was almost a sight to see the men and women tension boiling in one room.

"Harry"

Harry lifted his head. It was Olaf.

"It's been almost fifteen minutes now... could you kindly check if we are near our destination? The ladder to the deck is right over there" he pointed at the ladder in the corner "Alert us when you see Ibarra"

"Yes, sir" Harry said

The boat's interior was as small as Harry imagined it would be but he was able to navigate around without the difficulty to move around due to the cramped small spaces.

After passing down a narrow hallway, he passed by the cargo hold which was filled with their equipment bags. Harry ignored it but the sound of scuffling got him interested.

"Huh?" Harry wondered as he climbed into open cargo hold

He tiptoed down the room and heard bouncing noises.

What's making that sound?

"Kupo"

Harry nearly jumped when he heard the sound of a Moog. It could only mean one thing.

"Moco?" Harry called out

"Kupo!" The moog replied surprisingly as it shot out from behind a crate

"Moco!" Harry hissed "What are you doing here!"

Moco looked at Harry with his beady eyes as he staggered to get up.

"I – I – er... I came here to er – em..." he paused and looked down "I stowed away"

Harry bent down to look at the furry creature

"Moco, this isn't the place for you!" Harry said "What's ahead of you is far worse than anything you've imagined! Moco, I don't want you to die, you still have a life to go through"

"B-But Yumi –"

"Yumi?" Harry asked

"She was all sad and depressed at you going to war that I came with you to make sure you're going to be alright when you get back so Yumi can be happy, kupo"

Harry shook his head

"Look, I know Yumi likes me but my heart belongs to someone else"
Harry assured Moco

“Well she never told me that” Moco said crossing his arms looking strict “I came here to check up on you so Yumi won’t be all worried! And where does your heart belong too, kupo?”

Harry tilted his head in confusion.

“Never mind about the heart thing but will it help if I said I’m going to be fine?”

“Kupo! That’s what I was waiting for! Now if you excuse me, kupo” he fluttered to a hatch on the wall “I’ll be going –“ he tried pulling the hatch open “ – now! Why won’t it open?”

“Because it’s shut tight” Harry confirmed “The ship is in motion so all openings are closed except the aft deck and that’s where I’m heading to. You can fly from the outside”

“Eh, we might be too far off so looks like you have someone to go to war apart from gramps, kupo”

“Gramps? Rapticon Sr.?” Harry smirked

“What?” Moco looked at Harry defensively “He said he liked it when I called him gramps, kupo”

“Never mind.,” Harry shook his head “Look, if you want to come with me then at least stay at my bag for the rest of the time in battle, you’ll be fine”

“Yes sir!” Moco saluted “I know where your bag is so don’t worry”

Harry nodded as Moco disappeared into the innards of the cargo room.

Continuing down the hallway, Harry found the ladder that lead up to the aft deck. Taking the pipes that were attached to the wall, he climbed up.

- - -

It was a glorious sight. Over a hundred of boats all around and it was almost tantalizing to see the rising sun over them.

I wish Hermione and Ron saw this.

With the wind beating his face at every second, he took out a map from his pocket which detailed all the objectives at hand... After scanning the map, he overlooked it and found his jaw dropping at the sight before him.

It was a city in ruin... the city of Ibarra.

Everything was set ablaze due to the fact that the ships that advanced earlier at the day came to make some artillery fire, crippling the enemy defense. Harry looked at the beach and saw lots of bunkers.

Dammit.

A small mushroom cloud came out of the western parts of the city. Harry nearly jumped as the flash of light blinded him. His vision recovered as he squinted at the horizon.

All of sudden, a horn was blowing.

"Harry! Get down!" it was Rapticon Sr. "We are about to breach the beachhead!"

Nodding, Harry slid down the ladder with succession and followed Rapticon Sr. to the bridge where everyone started getting ready.

"Your bag, sir" said one of the sailors of the boats as he and a group distributed the bags of equipment to everyone

"Thanks" Harry said as he grabbed his which had his name on it. He felt the bag which showed a sign that a moogle was in. He prayed that he won't lose the bag during battle.

"Alright, men!" Olaf announced "This is it! Let the Sentinels guide us to victory! For the King!"

“Hear! Hear!” roared the soldiers except Harry and Rapticon Sr.

“To the boarding zone, now!” shouted an officer

Everyone went down a ladder at the back of the bridge which leads to a rectangular room. Harry had a feeling a hatch will open at the wall opposite to him.

“Heading to objective in two minutes!” shouted the speaker above them

“Equipment check!” shouted another officer

Harry and Rapticon Sr. checked themselves and everyone started yelling their team number followed by an “Okay!”

“Seven, okay!” Harry yelled when six (Rapticon Sr.) was called

“Excellent, now prepare yourselves, gentlemen!” Olaf said “I’ll be in the ship to watch operations... I’ll contact you via radios so don’t make a damn sure you lose them! Good luck!”

Olaf left the boarding zone via ladder.

“This is it fellas,” said a black mage behind them as he scanned them with his yellow shiny eyes “I’m your officer for the operation so whenever I order to attack, attack, got it?”

“Yes, sir” Everyone replied

“Good. Now portside, you’re with me starboard go with Rude” the black mage gestured to a dragoon warrior wielding a long spear

“Who are we under?” Harry asked

“We are under the black mage since we are on the portside of the boat” said Rapticon Sr.

“Ready?”

“Barely” Harry said in a grim tone

“You’ll be fine, don’t worry... just stick with me and I’ll save your skin”

“But what if you get killed?” Harry asked

“Then... you just have to watch my back then” Rapticon Sr. smirked
“It’s called brotherhood, after all”

“Clear the ramp! Thirty seconds!” the speaker above said

“Remember your objectives! Head down the beachhead, secure the area and meet up to the town square! Details are on your map, don’t forget it!”

The sound of explosions started to get louder with every bang. Harry wished there were windows or a hole where he can see what’s happening. Not knowing what’s ahead of him is making him feel cold.

“Twenty seconds!” yelled the speaker

Harry caught sight of people muttering prayers and some where holding their weapons so tightly that their hands began to shake.

“Ten seconds!”

The boat halted to a very rocky stop. The muffled sounds of explosions and machine gun fire could be heard outside. Harry gulped.

“Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit...”
muttered Rapticon Sr. as he did a sign of the cross.

“Prepare for landing!” shouted the PA system

The rotating sound of the gears that makes the hatch open became almost haunting to the soldiers inside.

Harry prepared for the worst.

“Just stay close to me, Harry!” Rapticon Sr. grabbed Harry by the arm

The moment the hatch fell down, everyone started scrambling out of the boat into the depths of hell itself.

“Argh!” shouted a warrior as he got caught by machine gun fire the moment he jumped down

“Cure!” shouted a white mage as she crouched before the fallen soldier

“Thanks” the warrior said as he witnessed his open shot wound sewing itself up in a very grotesque manner

“Harry!” Rapticon Sr. shouted as the two jumped off the boat.

Meanwhile, Olaf commanded two of his officers to man the deck guns.

“They need covering fire! Go and man the guns!”

“Yes, sir!”

Harry heard a loud sound coming from the boat behind him while he was hiding behind a rock. He looked up and saw two machine guns sprouting out of the head of the boat.

“Move, now!” shouted the man in one of the guns, shooting the opposing force

Harry, there you are!” Rapticon Sr. growled as he grabbed Harry by the scruff of his neck

Harry recovered from his shock and was able to move forward down a deep trench which snaked around the whole beach.

“You okay?” Rapticon Sr. asked

“Yeah, I’m fine” Harry said

“Let’s go” Rapticon Sr. said as he took out his hammer out and advanced

They moved forward up the trench in a crouching position.

“The guy who made the strategy is a genius.” Rapticon Sr. said as they moved “He made trenches allowing the soldiers to move into the city where something big will get them”

“How do you know?” Harry said as shrapnel from the explosion fell down on his head

“I was in battle before, Harry” he turned to Harry “I can tell what the enemy wants so keep your eyes out for any funny business”

They went down the trench encountering nothing so far. It was already five minutes when two soldiers from the opposition started taking the offense to them personally.

“Halt!” shouted the Natsi trooper

The clothes of a Natsi trooper had similarities to an army’s uniform from the real world. For one, the trooper wore a black trench coat and a helmet that had flaps at the back end of the helmet’s edge. The soldier wore a gas mask giving them a haunting appearance. They wielded machine guns that look similar to the guns to the game Dudley played on his computer which was about the war back at the forties.

“Prepare to fight, Harry” Rapticon Sr. said getting to a battle stance

“Duck!” Harry yelled as the soldier started shooting them

Rapticon Sr. and Harry jumped down to a wide debris which was laying at the trench due to artillery fire.

“Now what?” Harry asked

“Rule number – “ Rapticon Sr. flinched as the bullets rained on his side “ – twenty one, Harry: grenade”

Pulling out the pin, Rapticon Sr. tossed the grenade over them which was followed by a loud and sick “boom!”

“Now!” Rapticon Sr. shouted taking a peek

Harry and Rapticon Sr. followed the trench. They were almost near the bunker they saw.

After apprehending a small group of soldiers (thanks to a flying kick by Rapticon Sr.) and a flying grenade towards them, they finally reached the blind spot of the bunker which was the front wall.

“Are you of Team Bahamut!” shouted a white mage who arrived

“Yes” Rapticon Sr. said looking up at the bunker’s window which was shooting bullets from the inside

“Good, cause if you need to breach that bunker, you need a white mage!” he shouted whilst the loud whistling noise of machine gun fire echoed

“Thanks,” Harry said covering his ears

“Let’s go!” Rapticon Sr. commanded as they turned down a corner towards the entrance of the bunker.

“Good, there’s no one in the second floor!” the white mage said “According to the plan, the staircase is right up here”

They looked around the lobby which was like a maze filled with bunk beds, weapon racks and tables filled with map plans.

“Contact Olaf,” Rapticon Sr. ordered the white mage pointing towards a communication radio nearby “Meanwhile,” he grabbed a submachine gun from the rack “I’ll take care of some business... my way”

The white mage got to work while Harry looked around the tables for anything interesting. The tables told Harry that these people drank a

lot and read a lot due to the number of mugs which left essence of beer and the number of books lying around. Harry slid them away to one spot when something caught his interest.

Operation: Biestavale Manifesto

Operation: Biestavale?

The map which featured a print of the city itself was filled with numbers, arrows and lines which Harry recognizes through training... by the looks of it, it was an offensive.

"Kupo, what do you see?" Moco said inside the bag

Harry jumped. He forgot Moco was in his equipment bag all along.

"Moco! Are you okay?" Harry asked

"I'm fine... my ears hurt, kupo" he said from inside "I made a hole though, to see the action, kupo"

"Good, just stay there, okay?"

"Gotcha, kupo"

Harry turned to the manifest and decided to pocket the whole map and the rest of the plans in an empty envelope which was lying on the table. After stuffing the documents inside, Harry placed it in his pocket.

"Were you just talking to yourself?" asked the white mage who was in the middle of communication

Harry nearly blushed a moment but was able to make the save

"I was taking on my radio for Olaf..."

"But all radios are jammed" said the white mage "so why are you – oh wait, I'm getting a transmission – This is White Mage Jonirey Lopez,

I'm contacting from one of the bunkers, do you read me, over? We are in the process of securing a bunker I repeat..."

Harry looked on as he heard from above:

"Ack! It's the enemy!"

"Die bastards!" shouted the voice of Rapticon Sr.

The firing of guns from above urged Harry to run up. Ignoring the white mage, he ran up the stairs and saw Rapticon Sr. covering himself beside the open frame of the door.

"Professor!" Harry yelled

"Harry, get back!" Rapticon Sr. yelled as he turned and started shooting at the machine gunners

"Are you going to be okay?" Harry asked

"I'm fine" Rapticon Sr. reloaded his weapon "Guns are way easier to wield than hammers anyway... and I prefer swords!" he said in humor "C'mon, I killed the lot" he then set a smoke grenade which emitted red smoke signaling the bunker being secured.

"Let's go!" Rapticon Sr. yelled as they went down

"Did you secure the bunker?" the white mage named Jonirey Lopez asked

"Mission accomplished!" Harry said

"Good" Lopez then turned to the radio "We have secured a bunker! I repeat, we have secured a bunker!"

"C'mon Harry" Rapticon Sr. said "By this time, the others secured the bunkers. To the entrance gate of the city"

Followed closely by Harry, Rapticon Sr. got out of the bunker literally hitting a Natsi trooper on the head with his hammer.

“We are almost there!” Rapticon Sr. said as they climbed up the slope which connects to the trenches.

Harry saw a wooden gate with three mounted machine guns. How on earth would they take that?

His question has been answered, though.

Boom!

Harry jumped backwards at the explosion of the gate and the machineguns. He turned towards the beach and saw boats arriving unloading tanks and cavalry.

“Woo hoo!” Rapticon Sr. cheered “Reinforcements has arrived!”

Harry saw in amazement as the tanks moved in line halting to a stop. Then, in rapid succession, each fired on the bunkers causing them to crack and fall into a heap of dust.

“Gentlemen!” a voice said from the trenches

Harry saw their black mage commander climbing up with his team

“Outstanding performance!” he said “Where’s your commander?”

“We somehow lost him in the trenches but we were able to accomplish the task at hand, sir” Harry explained pointing to the bunker at the distant which they took earlier.

“I see,” the black mage rubbed his black chin and looked at Harry with his yellow eyes “Well then, as long as your commander isn’t here, I’ll be ordering you and my squad to secure the town square! Now move it!”

“Yes, sir!” Harry and Rapticon Sr. saluted

Leaving the battle at the beach to the tanks, the cavalry advanced to the city gates killing every enemy soldier in sight. Harry and Rapticon Sr., however, were taking the battle into the streets of Ibarra.

With the black mage on the lead, they ran down the avenue of the torn city which was set in flames.

The black mage raised his hand signaling them to stop.

"I see a nest over there" he said to a bangaa "You and Ducovney flank them down this alley whilst we suppress them, got it?"

"Yessss, ssssir" said the bangaa

"Alright men, by my signal, we engaged combat" said the black mage

The bangaa and the warrior named Ducovney went to the alley in caution. Harry looked at Rapticon Sr. who was arming himself with his newfound machinegun.

"Ready? Set... attack!"

Harry climbed out of his hiding place and started advancing on the nest which was firing on them the moment they spotted the platoon. While moving from cover to cover, Harry squinted at the nest which was firing on them.

The black mage rained fire on them which caused their nest to be set ablaze but because of the white mage present at their side, the fire was undone.

"Damn" said the black mage "I forgot they had mages"

"Don't worry, sir" Rapticon Sr. said "Looks like the bangaa did it"

"What?" he turned to see the bangaa engaging in combat with the nest giving each one a taste of being a dragoon

"Brilliant!" Let's go!" The black mage said

Harry followed Rapticon Sr. as the team rushed downwards the street. The sight of a large fountain could be spotted from afar telling them that they were near the town square.

“Over here! Now!” yelled the black mage “Looks like another team has engaged the square in combat”

They all entered the town square which was filled with many soldiers clashing at each other. Rapticon Sr. pulled Harry behind an old fashioned car as bullets rained on them.

“Be careful” Rapticon Sr. said

Harry peeked around the corner and saw the black mage emitting thunder around the soldiers causing most of the Natsi troopers’ lives. The black mage waved his hand at his team but the sudden explosion of a tank by the Natsis caused their commander to fly ten feet into the air, landing down at the ground.

“Commander!” yelled the bangaa, getting out from his hiding place “Don’t worry, I gotssss you!”

“L-I-leave me be, private” said the black mage with a groan “finish the mission, secure the town square!”

“No!” yelled the bangaa “Getsss me a whuesss mage, quick!”

“Harry, get a potion” Rapticon Sr. told Harry “And you guys!” Rapticon Sr. called the other team members “Give them covering fire!”

The others nodded and started distracting the enemy from shooting their commander.

“Alright” Harry got from his belt a bottle filled with green liquid

“Hey!” Harry called

The bangaa’s attention went to Harry and saw the bottle of potion. Harry tossed it to him and he caught it with succession.

“Here ya go, ssssir” said the bangaa allowing the black mage to drink

“Thank you” said the black mage

The bangaa started dragging the black mage to a covering spot where he could be safe.

“Let’s go, Harry” Rapticon Sr. said for the umpteenth time “and be –”

“Careful, I know” Harry said, smirking

The two got out of their hiding place and started attacking. Harry, in rapid succession was able to dispatch a soldier who was firing down another direction. Harry felt somewhat different when his sword met the flesh of another human being. It felt... strange.

Removing the feeling of remorse, Harry helped Rapticon Sr. dispatch a group of soldiers who was cornering him.

“Thanks, Harry”

“No problem”

Cue to this, a jeep with a mounted machine gun drove its way into the square and stopped right in front of Harry and Rapticon Sr.

Harry went into battle position while Rapticon Sr. reloaded his gun. The soldiers who were inside were about to shoot when...

SWISH!

Harry looked above as someone from the sky rained down on the jeep causing it to explode into pieces. Harry and Rapticon Sr. shielded their eyes from the flash.

After recovering their sight, Harry opened his eyes again and saw someone landing on the ground wearing royal blue armor and wielding a lance that emitted lightning.

He was a dragoon, from what Harry saw and he was tall, had a long nose and most noticeably, flaming-red hair.

“Ron?” Harry said feeling numb and happy all of sudden

“Hey Harry, I was wondering when you’ll show up” he said with the smirk that Harry would recognize so dearly.

READ AND REVIEW, PLEASE!

Chapter Seven

Weasley Dragoon

“Ron?” Harry said, smiling

Before Ron could say a reply, the sound of an explosion caused the three companions to find cover.

“Blimey, these boys don’t know how to quit, do they?” Ron said peeking out a corner

“Ron, where were you?” Harry asked

“It’s kinda of a long story, Harry” Ron grimaced when debris started falling from the sky “maybe I can tell you all about after this catastrophe”

Ron was right, Harry almost forgot that they were at the battlefield. Ron went on a crouching position and peeked over their cover

“By the way,” Harry said, imitating Ron “Nice lancing skills”

“Thanks” Ron smirked “I was in doubt of myself but I turned out pretty good...”

“Er, guys” said Rapticon Sr. “Hate to break the friend talk but I think we have company”

Behind them were five Natsi troopers. Harry recognizes one to be a white mage due to the white cloak.

“Surrender now!” shouted the soldier on front flourishing a sword

Harry, Ron and Rapticon Sr. stands up slowly. Harry exchanges looks with Ron and they both nodded. Harry gives the same signal with Rapticon Sr.

“Put down your weapons! Now!” shouted the soldier

Harry looked at Rapticon Sr. who smirked at him. Rapticon Sr. then did the most drastic thing Harry has ever seen.

“Harry! Ron!” Rapticon Sr. shouted “Duck!”

Harry and Ron did as they were told. Rapticon Sr. took out his brown coat and tossed it at the five troopers. Seamlessly, Rapticon Sr. grabs his sub machinegun and starts shooting them through his tossed coat taking them by surprise.

“Go get them, Harry!” Rapticon Sr. said as he reloaded “There are only three left!

Harry engaged them into battle with Ron.

“You go, Ron” Harry said

Ron ran down the gap between the two parties and using his lance, he stabbed the first soldier he saw making him jump off his feet. Fortunately, for him, the armor served a good defense.

“Harry, you go” Ron shouted as he jumped back to his former position

Harry runs towards the same soldier Ron attacked and slashes him with his sword making the soldier fall to his knees taking hold on his wound.

“Bastard!” shouted the soldier’s comrade

“Nice shot” Rapticon Sr. as Harry went back to his position with a backward jump

“Cure!” shouted the opposing white mage curing his party member.

“I’ll take out the white mage, you take the latter!” Rapticon Sr. shouted running towards the white mage, killing him with the smash of the hammer

“Hya!” Ron and Harry shouted as they attacked the remaining two.

“Argh!” yelled the soldiers as the impact of the two boys forced them to fly backwards to their demise.

“Let’s get back to the commander” Rapticon Sr. said “Ron, where’s yours?”

“I seem to have lost him back at the beachhead” Ron explained “But since I found you, I can team up with your team”

“Good” Harry said. He wasn’t too keen to part with Ron any sooner

“Let’s go!” Rapticon Sr. said

The party went down the edges of the town square, avoiding fire from the enemy. They finally reached the area where Harry’s team came from. Luckily for them, their commander, the black mage, who is now under treatment by a white mage, was there.

“Sir!” Rapticon Sr. came to him as they took cover beside him “The town square is almost secured, from what I saw; Team Ultima is flanking the latter”

“That’s good” said the black mage “Lieutenant, I want you and your current team, regardless of what squad they are, to take the remaining the nest at the street leading to the square. I will send a –“

The commander blacked out for a second. Harry began to wonder why when he heard the sounds of thundering footsteps from afar.

“What was that?” Ron asked as the sounds of continuing firing and explosions started to cease

Boom.

Harry peaked out of their hiding place.

“What do you see?” asked Rapticon Sr.

Harry lowered himself down quickly with a shock in his face.

“What did you see, Harry?” Ron asked

“Something big” Harry said

- - -

Riding on top a robotic Behemoth with a size of a three story building, a Natsi soldier guided the metallic creature down the square to help his comrades.

“Message from the commander-in-chief” said the radio in his ear “Kill the rest and capture the magic makers. Sir Schneider is expecting some potential in them”

“Yes, sir” said the rider

- - -

“What is it?” Ron asked

Harry lowered himself in state of shock... there was something huge coming this way. And it doesn't look like things can get any better for them.

“Holy Christ” Rapticon Sr. said “We're screwed”

“Position now, men!” yelled a nearby officer

Harry looked to his right and left. His fellow allies were positioning themselves strategically at some corners of the square. All of them had the sign of dread and fear etched to their faces as the Behemoth moved closer.

“Oh bollocks” Ron muttered “that's those half-machine things my Guildmaster has been talking about”

“Half-machine things?” Harry asked in surprise while his breathing became heavier “The general never mentioned any “half-machine things”!”

“Yes, he did” Ron stated “You were at the briefing right? Anyways, by the looks of it, they are using this as a last resort of surprise...”

Amazed at Ron’s extensive knowledge of this, he looked at the Behemoth moving closer. Its metallic plates seared into its organic skin looked haunting. The skull was had some blood oozing down while the right side of its face was entirely made of metal with a red glass for an eye.

“So how can we beat it?” Harry asked “Did your guildmaster mention anything at all?”

“Sadly, no... but he did mention that its weakness is a good strategy”

Harry gave Ron a look

“I know it doesn’t help but what else do we have?” Ron defended

“That I don’t know” Harry said as he heard the footsteps thundering closer

“My word” said the black mage commander who was still under medication “They are actually using it!”

“What is it!” Harry asked hoping to get the wondering feeling off his head

“It’s a Mecha-Fiend...” breathed the black mage “one of the Anarchy’s most feared tools of destruction. They come in varied forms and the Behemoth, which is coming this way, is said to be one of the most powerful ones... the only way to defeat it is to aim at its organic parts! That’s what we did during the war a decade ago!”

“Then looks like we have to hop on its weak point and attack it for massive damage then” said Ron

“Correct... for a Behemoth, you have to attack the openings of its armor” said the black mage “You do know this, right?”

Ron and Rapticon Sr. nodded. Harry wondered why he didn't remember such briefing of Mecha-Fiends. Then it hit him... he was probably in stupor during that part. Harry smacked his face subtly promising himself to be more attentive at next briefing... if there ever will be a next briefing.

"Good," said the black mage sitting up higher seeing the rest of the troops flanking the approaching Behemoth "hopefully, their commanders informed them what to do"

"Do we have anything big that can destroy it?" Rapticon Sr. asked

"The black mages can use their advance magic to destroy the Behemoth but that will only happen if we completely remove its armor plates" said the black mage "It is your job to do that"

"Affirmative" said Rapticon Sr. "Looks like we have a lot of homework to do boys"

Harry looked on as the Behemoth entered the square. It towered down the square and looked around. Harry spotted a rider above the head.

"Strange..." said the black mage "Why do they have a rider up there? They usually have them in a shell behind the Behemoths"

"Dunno, sir... maybe they have something for a change" said the white mage

The Behemoth stopped on its tracks giving the sense of foreboding Harry has felt before. At this point now, he prays for waking up at his comfy four-poster bed at the dormitory at Hogwarts.

Closing his eyes, he said in his mind

Please let me wake up, please let me wake up, please let me wake up...

Harry opened them and saw that he was still at Ibarra. He sighed and hoped for the best...

“Ahem!” boomed a loud voice that came from the Behemoth

Everyone looked at the Behemoth and saw that the voice came from the rider on top of it.

“Greetings to you, my fellow adversaries...” said the rider with an accent that sounded Eastern European “As you can see, it is pretty obvious that you fear the monstrosity that is the Mecha-Fiends. You know the history that surrounds this beast... the lives it has caused through the Great War. Now it has returned with new and impressive bravado! Fight it and you’ll face death... surrender now and I’ll spare you –“

“Like we can take his word for it” muttered Rapticon Sr.

“ – your lives!” yelled the rider

There was a long silence...

“Won’t surrender, eh?” muttered the rider. He chuckled “Sir Schneider was right after all... looks like I’ll have to bag the magic users” he then spoke loudly “My leader has warned of the iron fist that will push through your ranks and into the heart of your pride! Yet you come here with pride hoping that you’ll defeat us once more! Things have changed; there is no “next” victory! There will be a “new” victory and that will belong to us!”

Harry gasped as the Behemoth rammed a large meaty fist down the ground causing the earth to shake violently. At this point, a large orb emerged from above the metallic creature causing strong gust of winds and flashes of red and blue lights surround the square.

“Argh!”

Harry turned to see the black mage commander flung to the air together with the white mage who was tending to him.

“Gotcha!” Ron said as he grabbed the black mage by the hand “Give me a hand here!”

Harry was about to help when he saw from afar that many mages were flying towards the orb screaming for their lives.

“Dammit, that orb is sucking them in!” Rapticon Sr. said “But why isn’t it sucking us?”

“Because we are not mages...” Harry said

“What!” said Rapticon Sr. squinting through the gust of wind

“Because we are not mages! Look around you! Mages are being sucked in!”

Rapticon Sr. surveyed the area and saw Harry’s right.

“You’re right! Here, I’ll help!” Rapticon Sr. said as he grabbed the black mage commander by the hand

Harry helped out but the gravitational pull was too strong that the white mage who was grabbing the black mage by the feet flew into the orb as he screamed for help.

“No!” Ron shouted “Do you think they’ll die?”

“I hope not” Rapticon Sr. said as he pulled harder “HARDER!”

Harry pulled harder as the black mage commander looked on the orb that had many mages circling around, screaming.

“Let me go!” yelled the black mage

“What! Are you crazy!” Harry yelled

“Just do it! I may be lost but I’ve lived long enough to see the world. All hope is at your hands!” said the black mage “Let me go now and defeat the Behemoth!”

The three companions looked at the black mage with utmost remorse... They wouldn’t let go... they just couldn’t

“JUST DO IT! That’s an order!” yelled the black mage

Harry gulped and let go together with Rapticon Sr. and Ron.

“No!” Ron yelled again as he saw the mage’s body spun wildly as it traveled towards the orb which now had lots of mages circling around still screaming. Harry then saw that Gunners were shooting down the Behemoth but for some reason it doesn’t seem to feel pain.

“Dammit! How can we defeat it?” Harry said ramming a fist down the car that covered them the whole time

“I know... but by the looks of it, we can’t puncture through its armor with normal firepower” said Rapticon Sr. “The guy did say they are stronger now”

Harry pondered... how could they defeat it? They lost their commander and many magic users... he looked on as the Behemoth raised its arms whirling the orb as the magic users screamed violently.

“We can fight it face-to-face” Rapticon Sr. said out of nowhere “I know it’s a hopeless gamble but what else can we do? I can only shoot it down with my machinegun which doesn’t even have the firepower...”

Firepower, Harry thought.

Then it hit him... Harry looked behind and saw the road that lead to the beachhead. There were tanks stationed there for support and not to mention... they have more firepower than a machinegun.

“Wait... there are tanks down there right?” Harry said gesturing to the direction of the beach

“Yeah,” Rapticon Sr. said “But they can’t go further due to the obstruction of terrain. What are you cooking up there?”

“A plan” Harry said “I just need to find a way to get the Behemoth’s attention”

“What are you saying?” Ron said “Harry, you do know that can kill you, right?”

“I know, Ron but...” Harry looked at him “We have an order to fulfill”

Ron looked down remembering the black mage commander. He looked at Harry and nodded.

“But what do you think will distract it? Dung bombs? Because if I can recall correctly, there are no joke shops!” Ron said

Before Harry could answer, a loud “clap” emerged from the square. Turning to see what it was, he saw the Behemoth clapping its hands repeatedly and with final clap, a burst of light blinded the whole square.

“Argh!” Ron grunted as he shielded his eyes

The flash of light subsided giving everyone proper vision again. Harry opened his eyes and saw a new scene.

The Behemoth was still there but this time it was clutching in its right hand a metallic cage which seemed to be filled with –

“Mages!” Ron gasped “That thing has held the mages captive!” Ron pointed at the cage “What do we do?”

“Looks like we have to rescue them” Rapticon Sr. said “Every cage has a key”

He pointed dramatically at the cage. Harry and Ron followed where he pointed and they saw a large keyhole but where is the key?

“Where’s the key?” Harry wondered

“There” Ron said pointing at the rider

Harry looked at the rider who was tossing the key at the air and catching it again

“But that’s a small key, Ron” Harry said

“I know but I’ve heard somewhere that there are items that can enlarge itself if you have the proper words... like the Engorgement charm back at Hogwarts...”

“Ron’s right” Rapticon Sr. said as the Behemoth roared loudly at the attacking troops “I’ve read that somewhere around Moco’s place –“

“You rang?” Moco said as he popped out of the bag

“Jesus Christ, Moco!” Rapticon Sr. said as he fell back “DON’T SCARE ME LIKE THAT!”

“Is that a moogle?” Ron said “There are lots of Dragoon Moogles”

“Now’s not the time” Harry said “Moco, stay in there, looks like we’re in for a rough ride”

“Gotcha, kupo” said Moco as he went in the bag of Harry

“We have to hurry!” Ron said looking at the mages squirming in the cage “Or else we are dead meat”

“Yeah, we can’t have coffee breaks right now... wait, what the hell am I saying!” Rapticon Sr. said loudly as he suddenly jumped out of their cover and ran towards the Behemoth

“Is he nuts?” Ron looked in awe

“C’mon, He’s right” Harry said. Harry got his backpack out and opened it “Hey Moco”

“Yeah, kupo?” I’m gonna leave you here for awhile, okay? I’m going to do something drastic and it might harm you”

Moco looked at Harry and made a curt nod.

“Sure thing! I’ll find a place to hide, kupo. Don’t worry, if we all make this out alive, we can always meet at the victory party, kupo”

Harry smiled and patted the creature on the head who made a “Kupo” sound.

“Now go!” Harry said

The Moogles nodded and using his wings, Moco flew out of the town square and into the beachhead.

“C’mon, Ron!” Harry said as he left his hiding place.

“Wait for me!” Ron yelled as he followed Harry

Harry moved forward as the Behemoth started throwing numbers of rocks that came from fallen debris at one throw towards everyone. Harry dodges one of them as he ducked behind a huge rock.

“Harry, this is suicide!” Ron said as he sat beside Harry

“I know...” said Harry at once “but if this is the only way to get us out of here then I’m all up for it. C’mon!”

He grabbed Ron by the wrist and dragged him down the path of rocks and boulders. The Behemoth roared as the rider yelled “Go show ‘em who’s boss!”

Harry feared the worst praying that it won’t summon a Meteor like back at Hogwarts.

But it wasn’t a meteor... the clouds darkened as bolts of lightning struck the ground in quick pace.

“Harry!” Ron yelled as he ran for cover right before a lightning bolt zapped the area he was at

“Ron!” Harry said as he dodged a lightning bolt “Be careful!”

The battlefield was filled with yelling troops finding cover from the lightning bolts and the flinging rocks from the Behemoth. Harry jumped in surprised as one of them got caught by the bolts causing

him to wring in pain at the ground which made Harry feel sick and sorry for the man.

“HARRY!” Ron yelled

Harry looked at Ron and saw a boulder flying towards him. Harry ran and tackled Ron out of harms way.

“Thanks, Harry” Ron said standing up “How can we get to that beast!”

Harry groaned as he saw Rapticon Sr. shooting the Behemoth down but to no avail. What can defeat the monster? The rider seems to be under some shield which stops him from any pain.

“Ah!” Ron yelled as he grabbed Harry and strafed to the left before a bolt of lightning could zap them “Glad thing you can tell where the bolts attack!”

The words of Ron made sense... Harry saw orbs of lightning emerge before it could fire a bolt of lightning.

“Ron, let’s go”

The two ran down the square ducking and dodging from any attacks from the Behemoth. It was tense and Harry couldn’t believe he was actually moving at this scenario... it felt so real.

“We’re almost there!” Ron yelled “If only we can – ARGH!”

Harry jumped backwards as the Behemoth tossed a rock towards them only landing beside them causing an area of effect damage.

“Ow...” Harry groaned as he rubbed his behind “Ron?” he looked around

Harry looked up as an orb of lightning emerged.

“Dammit,”

Harry rolled to the left as the lightning orb zapped the ground with a bolt of lightning.

"I hate lightning!" Harry muttered

Placing his arms on the ground, Harry felt something at his left... he looked and saw a four feet metallic pipe that had a shape of a letter "T" ...

Conductor

Harry looked at his leather gloves and remembered that his gloves are part rubber and rubbers are stoppers for lightning...

"Oh what the hell" Harry said as he stood up and picked up the heavy pipe... he was expecting it to be heavy but for some reason, it felt light... but how's that possible? Did training made him used to carry heavy objects?

"Look out!" yelled a nearby Gunner

Harry turned and saw two rocks flying towards him!

Oh no...

Harry winced in fear and swung the T-shaped metal pipe at the two rocks as if that was the most obvious thing to do in the world! But alas, the results were different... Swinging the T-shaped metal pipe caused him to "capture" the two rocks thanks to the arms of the "T" that the pipe's shape adapts to.

What?

Feeling confident, Harry swung the T-shaped metal pipe in a three-sixty degree motion. Harry looked on as lightning zapped the pipe causing the pipe to be electrocuted strongly. As expected, Harry wasn't zapped thanks to his gloves.

It was... amazing. He could swing a metal pipe with two rocks suspending at the edge with lightning surrounding it! As if instinct told

him, Harry jumped at mid-air a few feet above the ground and after one spin he tossed the T-shaped pipe right at the Behemoth.

“Argh!” yelled the rider

The T-shaped pipe rammed into the ribs of the Behemoth causing it to roar in pain as the metal pipe slid across its waist causing it to bleed.

Harry landed on his two feet quite shocked at what he has just done...

Looking at his hands, he wondered: How was I capable to do that?

“ROOOAAAAARRRR!” boomed the Behemoth as it fell on its knees

“Ah!” groaned the rider as he tried to struggle with the fallen beast
“Get up, you!”

The rider wasn’t able to do anything at all due to interruption by Rapticon Sr. who took advantage of the current situation.

The raptor ran up from the back of the Behemoth and onto the head.

“Hey!” he yelled

The rider looked behind him and met a fist of Rapticon Sr. causing him to toss the key to the air.

“I got it!” Rapticon Sr. yelled as he jumped out of the head for the key which was flying across the air

Grabbing the key, Rapticon Sr. landed at the ground with a graceful roll and went to a crouch stance where he tossed the key towards Harry.

“Harry!”

Harry looked at the key and grabbed it.

“Yes!” Harry punched the air

“Open the cage now!” yelled Rapticon Sr. as he ran towards the Behemoth which was still stunned.

Harry nodded and ran towards the cage which the Behemoth dropped after being damaged earlier. Biestavale troops were now running towards the Behemoth with full spirits.

“Look out!” yelled a Warrior

Harry turned and saw the Behemoth emerge from its stunned state and roared loudly. It made a large clap of lightning causing everyone to flee for cover. Harry took a step backward and tripped on debris.

Harry groaned as he tried to stand up but he felt like he was being watched...

He looked up and saw the Behemoth looking at him with pure anger... that look made the hairs on the back of Harry's head stand on end. He looked at the key he was holding and saw the Behemoth looking directly at it... it was very obvious.

“Oh no...” Harry said as he started running backwards and in an instant, he broke into a run.

“AARRRRRRGGGHHH!” the Behemoth roared as it started running towards Harry on its four legs

“This can't be happening, this can't be happening, this can't be happening!” Harry said to himself repeatedly feeling the beast running closer... he felt the fear going up to him as he started sweating.

I need to go to the beach!

Harry sprinted towards the pathway which leads to the beaches. He ran as fast as he can. It was the run for his life from a beast that was worse than the Basilisk or a dementor put together.

“Get the key back and KILL HIM!” shouted the rider

“NO!” yelled a voice from the left of the Behemoth

Harry took a quick turn and saw Ron jumping from a heap of rubble and stabbing the Behemoth’s hind legs with his lance. The Behemoth stalled a bit but recovered and started chasing Harry again.

- - -

Rapticon Sr. looked beyond the square and saw more Anarchy troops marching in.

“Shoot” he muttered

He looked around and saw a commander

“Sir! Over there!” He directed

The commander looked beyond and saw the troops. He nodded and ordered for an attack. Now with that taken care of, Rapticon Sr. ran for the Behemoth.

He armed himself with a grappling gun, a Mercenary item, and ran towards the Behemoth, who had Ron suspending on its hind legs thanks to his lance.

Bless the boys for such courage!

And thus, he ran

- - -

Ron stood on the back of the Behemoth and unsheathed the lance from the beast’s hind legs. He worked on his balance on the back of the Behemoth as he moved towards the rider.

Ron nearly fell of the beast as the beast steered left. Looking forward, he saw Harry taking many quick swerves down alleyways to escape but would later be caught by the Behemoth.

“I must save Harry”

- - -

Harry ran as fast as he could. He felt like he was at the first task during the Triwizard Tournament with the Hungarian Horntail... oh how he wished to be back at Hogwarts.

“Feast on his man-flesh!” yelled the rider

Harry took a swerve down a wide street where a tall and wide obelisk stood proudly at the center. He hoped Ron will make another stall.

And he did.

The Behemoth yelped in pain as Ron stabbed it at the back. Harry stopped on his tracks and saw Ron stabbing the beast on its back with blood spraying everywhere.

“Harry! Run!” Ron yelled

“What’s this?” said the rider “Another tool of the kingdom” he took out a pistol from his holster and aimed at Ron.

Ron gasped and ducked from pistol fire.

“Watch out, Ron!” Harry said but gasped

The Behemoth regained its strength and saw Harry. It made a roar and started running to Harry.

“Woah” Ron said as he nearly fell off

“Give it up, boy” said the rider, who was sitting on the head of the Behemoth perfectly thanks to the platform he was standing at “We’ll all die anyway in the end”

“Not on my watch you git” Ron answered back coolly

Meanwhile, Harry ran towards the obelisk and made a turn. The Behemoth mimicked Harry and started chasing Harry around the obelisk.

“Harry!”

Harry looked around and saw Rapticon Sr. enter the street on a motorcycle. He stopped the vehicle and aimed a grappling gun at the creature.

“Just keeping turning!”

Harry nodded and continued running around the obelisk while the Behemoth did the same.

Rapticon Sr. shot the grappling gun on the metal plates of the beast.

“Gotcha!”

He started the motorbike and drove it around the obelisk at the opposite direction of Harry’s.

“Let’s see I can do an AT-AT” said Rapticon Sr. as he spun around

“Ah!” Ron gasped as he jumped off the Behemoth dodging another shot from the rider who is now having difficulty with the grappling hook’s rope wrapping around the Behemoth and the obelisk.

Harry stopped running as he saw the Behemoth constricted by the ropes that Rapticon Sr. wrapped around.

“Ha!” Ron cheered on

The Behemoth tried to struggle but it tripped causing it to fall on its knees. The sheer force that was implemented on the ropes and the Behemoth caused the rider to fly off the head of the beast.

“AHHHH!”

The rider flew across the sky and landed at the face of a brick wall making a very sick “thud”.

“Ewww... “ Ron said as the body of the dead rider fell to the ground.

Rapticon Sr. stopped the bike and detached the rope from his gun.

“Amazing how long and sturdy these Mercenary grappling guns can be, eh?” he said smirking

“You did it, sir!” Ron said

Harry sat down on the ground panting hard... that was a really long run.

“Hey Harry!” Rapticon Sr. called “C’mon, hop on! We need to free some mages out of their bird cage”

“Can I just rest a bit?” Harry said

The Behemoth made a loud grunt making Harry think otherwise.

“Never mind, lets go”

Harry rode on the sidecar of the motorbike with Ron taking the back seat of the bike.

“Ready?”

They both nodded and they were off.

- - -

The bike left the wide street leaving the Mecha-Fiend alone, trapped in ropes...

The Behemoth started struggling hard and tried gnawing at the ropes but with no avail. It roared loud and pulled downwards making the obelisk, where it was tied to, crack.

With a lot of strength, the beast pulled harder and harder and finally...

CRACK!

The obelisk fell causing the ropes to loosen. The cyborg removed the ropes around itself and made a thundering roar...

A Behemoth never forgets what their prey looks and smells like.

- - -

"Do you hear that?" Ron asked while he was grabbing Rapticon Sr. by the waist

"That's probably the Behemoth roaring out of pain" Rapticon Sr. replied "You two made a show back at the square"

"Thanks" Ron said "Wait... there is one thing I want to know..."

He turned to Harry as they went down another street

"Harry, what was that thing you did to the Behemoth? You know, those fancy flips with those rocks and that pipe?"

Harry wished he knew what he did... he never knew he was capable of doing something that flashy.

"I wanna know too" said Rapticon Sr. "Did someone trained you to do it? Cause that was some awesome moves you did"

"Umm... er – actually, I wasn't aware that I could do such a thing" Harry said

"What? What do you mean? It looked like you knew what you were doing!" Ron said in amazement

"Look, I don't even know what I'm capable of okay?" Harry defended "Just look at you, you were able to destroy a vehicle with your lance and I don't think you were capable of that before, weren't you?"

“Harry’s right, Ron” Rapticon Sr. stated “Remember that this is not our world... things are different here and so do we except we know each other and have our same personalities... what’s different about us is what we can do in this world...”

Harry pondered what happened back at the square... if he was able to do that devastating move, what else can he do? He remembered back at the first time he used a sword against the bangaa thugs, it felt so easy to use... as if he knew what to do...

What could this mean?

“I have a theory...” Harry said

“Fire away” replied Ron

“Um... I can’t seem to put it in words right but what if... we are in this world but not “placed” like that – I mean look at Hermione, she’s the General’s daughter and it seemed like she has a life and it looks like she lived here for a long time...”

“Wait, you met Hermione already!” Ron said in shock

“No” Harry said “We saw her but we never got to meet her... we’re working on it though... anyways, what I mean is... do we have lives here in this world?”

“I get it” Rapticon Sr. nodded “You’re wondering if we have our own place in this world? Like how Hermione is the General’s daughter, you are wondering if you have a life here. Am I correct?”

“Something like that...” Harry said “If I knew how to do those things then that means I might’ve been trained by someone from the past that I don’t even know off”

“Interesting...” Rapticon Sr. said “F.F.O. is truly an amazing place”

Ron made a double take.

"I knew it! That thought has been pondering my brain for the past week! I found myself at an alley at the Greater District and went around and I eventually became a Dragoon... you guys better fill me in everything you know, okay?"

"Sure," said Harry "For now I'll tell you that I ended up at Gysahl Plains which is a day away from Biestavale"

"I ended up at the belly of Civilian District filled with thugs and what not" Rapticon Sr. said

"Question, how do we get out of here?" Ron asked

"We need Accula" Rapticon Sr. stated "He made this book, so he probably knows how to get out of it"

"Probably'?" Harry asked

"How should I know? But it's likely" Rapticon Sr. made an apologetic look

BANG!

Rapticon Sr. stopped the bike and looked behind him.

"What was that!" Ron said looking at the back.

"ROOOAAARRR!"

It was the Behemoth.

"Oh my Merlin" Harry said

"Step on it, sir!" Ron yelled

"Got it!" Rapticon Sr. said as he accelerated down the road as the Behemoth chased towards them fueled with anger.

"I thought the ropes were unbreakable!" Ron shouted

“They are unbreakable!” replied Rapticon Sr. “Maybe the obelisk didn’t hold the bastard that well”

“Wait,” Harry said realizing the old plan he devised back then
“Professor, go to the beachhead, now”

“What? Why?” Ron asked

“There are tanks over there and they can fire on the Behemoth! That way, its armor will fall off and they can go for the kill. It’s that simple!”

“You’re nuts, Harry!” Ron replied “First, we don’t know where the beach is!”

Ron was right... he hoped he was equipped with a map.

“Then let us do a little ‘Trial and Error’ then, huh?” Rapticon Sr. said
“I’m taking southeast now!”

Rapticon Sr. made a dramatic swerve catching the Behemoth by surprise. Ron screamed as the beast went over them. Rapticon Sr. then stepped on the break and ignited the engine to go forward as the beast recovered from its abrupt brake.

“Nice move” Harry said, remembering the action movies he watched back with the Dursley’s

“Thanks, I always wanted to do that” Rapticon Sr. smirked.

They drove down the road south as the Behemoth caught up on them. Harry felt relieved that it wasn’t as fast and aggressive as before thanks to the damage they caused to it ages ago.

“Almost there!” Rapticon Sr. yelled as he saw a sign that stated the beach and docks were ahead. They were then met with a fork on the road.

“Alright, guys... fork ahead!”

“Your call, Ron” Harry said

“Er – right”

“I think left” Harry suddenly said

“Make up your mind!”

CRASH!

The three gasped as the Behemoth appeared out of nowhere ahead of them. It burst through the fork on the road causing the buildings to collapse. Using its massive tail, it tail whipped their vehicle causing the bike and the three to fly off a high distance from the ground.

“Argh!” Ron yelled beside Harry

The three landed on the ground with a thud. Harry coughed up blood and saw that his glasses were broken.

“Oh snap” Harry said looking at his specs

But the mighty roar of the Behemoth stopped him from observing his glasses. Harry stood up and saw that he was near bodies of water... they were near the beach at last!

But where were Rapticon Sr. and Ron?

Harry scanned the area and saw them unconscious. He was about to run for them when the Behemoth landed between him and his friends. It was almost a sight to see a Behemoth’s face this close.

Oh my Merlin...

The Behemoth’s face was leveled with Harry’s. Its breath stank of stale meat and saliva which didn’t accommodate Harry’s nose. Harry wished now he woke up from this horrible nightmare!

Now it’s the time to wake up, Harry!

But there were no dreams or nightmares... everything is as real as it gets.

The Behemoth made another might roar and approached towards Harry on its legs, Harry walked backwards and started making some small backward runs away from the beast until he was at the edge of the docks... it was at this point Harry realized that he wasn't at the beach... they took the wrong place.

"Dammit" Harry swore looking down below...

So this is where it ends... looks like I'll never apologize to Hermione, after all.

The thought of something so awful made Harry feel tearful... he was never going to see his home, Hogwarts, again. His friends, life and everything... he's all going to lose it in a place he's stranger to.

Harry knew what was coming... and if it pained him more than ever then so be it!

The Behemoth closed its ugly face towards Harry to the point they were pointblank of each other. It sniffed him and made a grunting noise. Harry felt his knees shivering out of fear and his sweat falling down like a waterfall. Never in his life would he feel such fear from a creature.

The Behemoth then opened its mouth. Harry knew what was coming...

He looked inside the beast's mouth and saw its purplish tongue and twin tonsils... it was so disgusting seeing the saliva flow everywhere and the red dot that was flickering at the ceiling of its mouth –

A red dot?

Harry did a double take. Was that a laser pointer he just saw?

SWOOSH!

The sound of what seemed to be a rocket rang in Harry's ears triggering his instincts to make him jump out of the way.

"Argh!" Harry gasped as he saw a missile pass by above him. The roar of the Behemoth was made as the rocket made contact to its mouth causing a humongous explosion.

Harry landed on the surface below the lower docks. He landed on his back and yelped in pain as his back felt like he broke it.

"Ow my back...!" He groaned

Harry opened his eyes and looked above. From the looks of things, he just saw the most disgusting thing ever.

Lying on the floor was a decapitated corpse of a cyborg Behemoth with its head severed showing off the innards of its neck as blood oozed out of its neck. The foul smell of the corpse spread like wildfire.

"Ugh," Harry groaned as he covered his nose

Wait, who saved his life?

Harry looked around to see who shot the rocket launcher. He was about to give up finding the person when he saw Yumi Kusamari a few feet away from him holding a rocket launcher on her shoulders.

"I knew I should've came with you guys!" she said

"What are you doing here!" Harry said sitting up, wincing in the pain on his back

"Shhh, Harry.." Yumi said walking towards him dropping the rocket launcher "You're hurt, you better be brought to a white mage fast! Where's Rapticon Sr.?"

"He's over there..." Harry said pointing towards the entrance of the docks "with a friend of mine, he has flaming-red hair and goes by the name Ron"

“Oh, you found your other friend?” Yumi said, smiling

“Yeah... but now is not the time – wait – how did you get here?”

“Stowaway” Yumi clarified. There was a supply boat that was headed here and I hopped on cause I was er – “ she blushed “– worried about you”

Harry looked at her in the eyes and saw that it was genuine.

“Yumi, I know you like me” Harry said making her blush furiously a lot more “But you know that I don’t belong to this world and if I ever get into a relationship with anyone who lives here then that will make things complicated!”

“No, no, no, Harry!” Yumi said waving her hands defensively “It’s not like that! I – I like you because I see you somewhat of a big brother figure...”

“What?”

“A big brother...” she said “I – I never had one and I wished I had someone who would take care of me and something like that...”

Harry looked at her with a peculiar look... was this damage control? Because back at the alley, she was totally checking him out.

“So if you’re implying that I have a crush on you then save it cause I don’t!” she said “Not saying you’re not boyfriend material”

“Yeah” said Harry at once “Look, now is not the time! I promise I’ll talk about this later but I should go back to the towns square and free the mages held captive!”

“Oh yeah, I was there ages ago! They cleared the square, it’s now friendly territory!” Yumi said

“That’s great!” Harry said trying to stand up but the pain on his back stopped him from doing so “Ouch... um – er... a little help here, please?”

“Okay, Harry” she said helping him out. Harry looked at her and saw that she wasn’t blushing despite holding him this close “Just be careful next time okay?”

“Yeah, I’ll make sure I have a thief with a rocket launcher as a backup plan”

Yumi giggled

The two saw Rapticon Sr. and Ron and recovered them with revival items. After a little explanation of Yumi’s presence, the party headed for the town square where they freed the mages from cage. Thanks to some magic, the key’s size enlarged causing it to be as big as the keyhole.

“Great job, men” said the black mage commander to Harry, Rapticon Sr. and Ron “I’ve seen what you’re capable of Mr. –“

“Potter”

“Weasley”

“Raptor”

“Ah yes,” said the black mage with a chuckle “Well, after your heroic efforts in today’s operation, I think a reward is in order!”

“Sweet” said Ron in excitement

“Thank you, sir” Rapticon Sr. nodded “Speaking of which, I think you should see this, sir”

Rapticon Sr. took out the manifest plans of Operation: Biestavale which he found at the bunker ages ago. The plans intrigued the black mage.

“Th – this – this is – I’m lost for words! We should inform the Council immediately! Thank you for the find, Mr. Raptor! Your initiative shall be noted!”

Harry looked at the town square where the battle for his life had commenced... it was over... finally over.

Wow... I never knew I'd make it this far...

The feeling of surviving this war gave Harry a fulfilling soul... if only he could find Hermione and get out of this place but right now, he just wants to have a peace of mind from the recent events... he survived, that's all that matters at this hour.

The place was being filled with Biestavale soldiers moving in Ibarra securing the area for any remnant troops and such. The town was already under protection from Biestavale in a matter of minutes.

It was now a matter of time that Olaf would arrive.

"Solid effort! Solid effort!" cheered Olaf as he came up to them "I've heard a lot about what you did" he gestured to Harry and Rapticon Sr. "And you! Mr. Weasley, I also heard of your courageous effort to save Harry from the raging Behemoth! So far, I'm very impressed by your battlefield performance... we need people like you in battle!"

Harry wished he wouldn't be in battle again, though but nonetheless, he was flattered and nodded in response.

Olaf chuckled

"Looks like we'll be having the victory party, after all!" said Olaf "My, my, would General Grangeré be happy to hear the news! He'd probably expect it! He is the best strategist in the world! And his daughter will smile after hearing the liberation of Ibarra!"

Harry and Ron looked at Olaf at the sound of Hermione.

"Speaking of which, I think we should all go back home and prepare for the preparations for the celebrations!" he nodded "Hermione Grangeré will be happy to know that there will be a party, she loves attending them!"

“You mean she’ll be there at the victory party?” Harry asked

“Knowing her personality, yes” said Olaf smiling

Harry made quiet “yes!” and turned to Ron and Rapticon Sr.

“Did you hear that?” Harry said

“Yep, we’re gonna meet Hermione after all” said Rapticon Sr. and to think we were trying to sneak around the castle to find her! Bless us!”

“What? You snuck in the castle once?” Ron said in amusement “You seriously should tell me what happened this past week!”

“Don’t worry, Ron” said Rapticon Sr. “We will tell you everything! But first, I want to relax and have a nice cup of tea”

“Yeah, me too” said Harry

“Harry!” yelled the squeaky voice of Moco

“Moco” Harry said as he turned to the Moogle

“You’re alright, kupo!” said Moco “I knew we’d make it out alive!”

“I know” Harry smirked rubbing the head of Moco “Oh yeah, I want you to meet someone” he carried Moco to Ron “Moco, meet my best friend, Ron Weasley. You can call him Ron”

“Hi! Harry spoke a lot about you and Hermione, kupo!” said Moco

“Heh, he did?” Ron said smirking at Harry “Yeah, that’s Harry, always saying good stuff about people but between you and me” he lowered his voice “He’s just sucking up!”

“I heard that!” said Harry jokingly as the others laughed at the recent turn of events.

It was a sunny day as they sailed back to the city of Biestavale. With the victory party at hand, being united with Ron once more, surviving

in battle and seeing Hermione again, Harry wouldn't think of a better place to spend this wonderful day but in the end the taste of adventure and fantasy is fresh in Harry's tongue.

Who knows what adventures lie ahead of him and his friends? It all depends on choices as the road ahead of them can spawn many possibilities... possibilities that are likely to happen in the mysterious realm of Atrynömunal...

READ AND REVIEW, PLEASE!

Chapter Eight

Waltz For The Twin Moons

“Yumi, I appreciate the help with putting on my dress robes but I rather do it myself”

“C’mon! I was named best dresser back at my school days!”

“Yes, but two corsages isn’t going to pull itself off at the dance floor”

Harry looked down at his chest and saw two extremely large roses on his robes. For the past few hours, Yumi has been dressing Harry up for the big victory party tonight. This morning, he was at Ibarra fighting off the biggest battle he has ever faced and hopes that he will never do it again... but that’s wishful thinking depending on how long he’ll be in Atrynömunal.

“Hee hee” giggled Yumi “I know, I have problems when it comes to corsages! I’m just crazy with them”

Harry gave her a peculiar look.

“Fine,” Yumi rolled her eyes and pulled the two corsages out and replaced them with a small rose “Happy?” she smirked

“Thanks” said Harry

He walked towards a nearby mirror and looked at himself. He was surprised to find a good set of dress robes at the shops that looked identical to his back at Hogwarts, albeit in black color. After a good long nap since he returned from the battle, Harry, Rapticon Sr., Ron, Moco and Yumi went to the Greater District to shop proper attire for the party tonight.

“Five hundred gil for a set of pants! I call shenanigans!” Rapticon Sr. spat as they left the clothes shop.

Harry chuckled, remembering that memory...

“So...” said Yumi

“So’ what?” Harry asked

Yumi rolled her eyes

“You’re going to a political party! And you do know what that means do you?”

Harry didn’t quite get what Yumi was on to.

“Ay...” she shook her head “It will be a political event and that means ‘political’ figures in the kingdom will be attending the party and that includes kings, queens, counts, countess, generals and their children...”

The emphasis of the last word in Yumi’s sentence made Harry see her point.

“Oh...” remembering it now “I – I haven’t thought of it yet”

“C’mon, whether you like it or not, Hermione will be there! She is your girlfriend, right?” Yumi said looking at Harry

Despite telling Yumi that he was someone from another world, he hasn’t told her that Hermione wasn’t his girlfriend... both out of this world and in this world.

“Yeah, she is...” Harry looked down, not meeting her eyes “I can’t wait,” he made a nervous chuckle

He looked at Yumi who was staring away into space. A tinge of concern took over Harry’s mind... he knows what it feels like to find out your crush is with someone else.

“Er...” said Harry “Yumi?”

“Yeah?” she looked at Harry

“Are you okay?”

"I'm fine..." she said leaning her head on the wall adjacent to her "I'm just sleepy"

"Okay..." Harry said and looked at the clock

It's already half-past six.

"I have to go now" said Harry, walking towards the door out of Moco's house "Are you sure you don't want to go?"

"I'm fine!" Yumi said with a nod "Besides, I don't have the proper attire for the party"

"You sure?" Harry said "There will be lots of cake" he added with a teasing voice

For the past few days, Harry noticed Yumi's craving for cake and pastries.

"I'll pass" she waved a hand "You have to be with your girl and if I'm there, she might see it differently" she chuckled

Harry sighed.

She's not my girlfriend... if I wanted to...

"So you're going to be fine?" Harry asked

"Yep, I'll just hang around here and play some Triple Triad with Moco" she stated

Before Harry could ask, he closed his mouth, waved her goodbye and left the house for the castle.

- - -

The castle was in such grand and splendor for it is a celebration for the victory and liberation of Ibarra! The guild members who participated in the battle entered inside the castle through the large

main gate with walls that extends from both sides separating the Lower Royal District and the Castle.

Through the gates, one would approach towards the wide courtyard filled with flora by the thousands. Tonight, the plants were decorated with magical lights dancing around giving the castle grounds the air of peace.

Between the castle ground stood the large fountain where the statue of the Sentinel Shiva stood sprouting water from her fingertips.

Inside the castle doors is the entrance hall and beyond that is the Grand Hall where the party is being held at.

People were dancing with their partners while others feasted to their hearts content. The wide skylight that took the whole ceiling revealed the cloudless starry sky and the Twin Moons of Atrynömunal. The orchestra played very melodic tunes whilst people swayed to the music, servants of the castle served everyone with appetizers and drinks.

Speaking of drinks...

"Good evening, sir" said the waiter "Would you like to entertain yourself with a couple of drinks?"

Harry, who was at the corner of the hall away from the partygoers, looked up in surprise. For the past few minutes, he has been looking everywhere for Hermione that he almost forgot he was in a party.

"Um, thanks" said Harry taking a glass as the waiter left.

Where is she?

Harry drank his drink while looking above the brim for any sign of his best friend. Rapticon Sr. and Ron were elsewhere doing the same thing. Until now they haven't found the General's daughter.

Do you think she'll be under tight security? Will she have bodyguards?

Harry shook his head for a moment removing those thoughts. He will get Hermione and leave this place... no matter what happens.

“Potter!”

It was Olaf.

“Greetings, sir”

“I see you’re enjoying at your side of the party” he chuckled “Why don’t you ask some of the daughters of the Council members? They’re itching to dance with war-torn heroes like you, boy” he winked

“It’s okay, sir... I’m waiting for someone” Harry smiled apologetically

“Ah yes, ah yes, you’re already taken!” He nodded “Pity though, one of them has been eyeing on you for the past few minutes”

Harry made a dry laugh

“And who might that be, sir?” he said as he took a shot from his glass

“The General’s daughter”

Harry nearly spit his drink.

“W-What?” Harry asked looking at Olaf with excitement and shock

“General Grangeré’s daughter is here tonight and I’ve met her ages ago and she seems to be eyeing on you the moment you entered the hall!” Olaf laughed “You’re lucky, she a very picky one, that Hermione... always quiet and mysterious... one time she told me about having dreams of a castle much like this one... except it was a school”

Harry’s heart started beating faster. He wished Olaf could finish so he can sprint for Hermione.

“But she never really remembered how the castle looked like... and to think I’m her uncle Olaf! I should spend more time with her if I want to get into that brain of hers”

“Um... sir” said Harry “Uh, I wished we could talk longer but I think I’d like to meet her”

Olaf made a hearty laugh

“Oho! I can see you’re eyeing at my niece now!” He slapped Harry at the shoulder “Hopefully, Jacques will approve. He is very protective of his daughter”

“I can see that” Harry said, remembering the incident two nights ago

“In fact,” Olaf continued while he looked around “I think she left the hall for something”

Harry’s heart fell

“Don’t worry, lad” Olaf nodded “She’ll turn up soon! If I see her, I might as well tell her that there is a handsome young man waiting for you by the punchbowl”

After thanking Olaf, the Gulidmaster left Harry to his thoughts...

So Hermione is looking for me too? I bet she thought she saw me and had to find me...

The thought made Harry smile. Hopefully, if Hermione was looking for him maybe he can apologize to her without worrying of anger or the like. Now all he had to do is to wait for Hermione to come back as Olaf said.

The music played on through the night and Harry was already wondering if Hermione would be around. He was about to quit waiting and go on searching for her... maybe find Ron and Rapticon Sr. first, then find Hermione.

It was time to take action. Taking in what's left of his glass, he straightened his robes and –

“Hey!”

Harry made a double take and his jaw dropped.

Wearing a white silky dress that reached above her knees and matching heels, a very pretty girl with wavy brown hair walked towards Harry in grace.

Is that...? It couldn't be...

The girl looked exactly like Hermione! But she looks different... and she's too pretty to be Hermione... not that Harry thinks Hermione isn't pretty. He took a deep breath as the girl walked towards him.

“You're the best guy here” she stated giving him a smile “Dance with me?”

Harry wanted to speak but his unusual state of shock took most of him.

The girl rolled her eyes in a humorous way.

“Let me guess... You'll only dance with someone you like!” she then grabbed Harry by the chin and forced him to look at her chocolate brown eyes “Look into my eyes... You're-going-to-like-me... You're-going-to-like me”

She released her grasp from Harry's chin.

“Did it work?” she tilted her head

Harry then made a coughing noise and said

“Hermione?” he finally said

“Oh,” she said “So you do know me” she waved around the crowd “Everyone in this city knows me and I get tired with all the boys staring... can’t a girl have her own privacy?” she giggled

Something wasn’t right here...

“Hermione, it’s me, Harry!” said Harry

“Excuse me?”

“Harry! You’re best friend! Harry Potter from Hogwarts!” Harry looked at her with disbelief

“I – er –“ Hermione looked at Harry with uneasiness “Are you alright... um... Harry? If that’s your name, that is”

“It’s my name” Harry said quickly “Hermione, don’t you remember me?”

“I can’t recall” said Hermione looking at Harry “But you look a lot like my friend Russell –“

What was going on? Why is Hermione treating him like a total stranger? Was this a joke? Is she doing this as a sign of her anger towards him from their fight a week ago? If it so then this is not a time for playing games.

“Hermione!” Harry said “Stop playing games! We have to get out of here!”

Hermione looked taken aback

“I beg your pardon? Playing games? Getting out of here?” she raised an eyebrow “I barely know you!”

Great...

“Don’t... you remember me?” Harry asked

"I'm sorry" she frowned with pity "I can't recall if I've met you before... Are you sure you're alright? My uncle said that you did quite a bag of tasks during the battle"

Hermione...

Harry never felt so sad in his life... his best friend completely forgot about him! He felt like he lost an important part in his body... all the experiences, all the thoughts they shared... forgotten!

Hermione seems to be having her own share of uneasiness.

"I – uh... er – look, I probably have met you before but I tend to forget!" Hermione apologized

"That's not true!" Harry said "You always remember... You have the best memory ever with that smart head of yours"

Hermione gave Harry a surprised look... as if she thought he was reading her mind.

"Are you a mind reader?" she asked grinning

"Uh... no" Harry said

"Really? Because you're quite good at it! My father keeps on pointing out how I remembered everything in my life like the time I tripped down the stair when I was a little girl and the time I –"

Hermione stopped all of a sudden and made a slight blush.

"I think I'll stop there" she giggled "I ramble too much at times especially when I tell facts and figures and..." she looked down at her feet embarrassingly "I'm rambling again, aren't I?"

The thought of Hermione being uncomfortable in front of Harry pained him... she was never like that to him...

"Hermione..." he said quietly

“Um – er...” Hermione bit her lower lip “Do you want to dance?”

“...I can’t dance” said Harry remembering his fourth year

“You’ll be fine. Come on!” she grabbed his wrist and pulled him towards the center “I can’t be on the dance floor alone.”

Harry tried to resist but if this is the only way to be with Hermione and get her to remember him again then he’d do it.

Moving along the throng of dancing people, who were dancing to the same steps and music, Hermione dragged Harry to the center of the room and went into position. Hermione grabbed Harry’s right hand, placed his left on her waist and she placed her left hand behind his back.

“You ready?” she smiled

Without even answering, Hermione and Harry started dancing along with the music. Harry had the “two left-feet” scenario accidentally stepping on Hermione’s feet.

“Ow!” she squeaked

“Sorry! I – I just haven’t –“

“It’s okay, you’ll be fine!” she said “Now follow me”

They stood still in dancing position then –

“One, two, three, one two, three, one, two, three...” Hermione said as they took a few steps.

Harry smiled as he saw he was doing it right. It felt so natural for him. Was this another one of his hidden talents that the world has given him?

They danced around a bit to the cheery music.

“See? You’re doing it!” Hermione giggled

“I know – oomph!”

Harry and Hermione accidentally bumped to another dancing couple who gave them affronted looks.

“Sorry,” Harry said, scratching his head awkwardly as the couple left with their noses up

“Ignore them,” said Hermione “They are one of the snobs of the Greater District... ugh, I hate them so much”

Then she giggled and looked at Harry with a toothy grin. The music seems to go into its climax signaling Harry that the next set of steps will be fast.

And indeed it was.

Left foot, right foot, swing partner...

These actions played in Harry’s mind as if they were recorded in his mind. Everything felt so grand and easy for him. He and Hermione did a step and slide followed by three spins by Hermione and the finale of Harry and Hermione closing in on each other making the lights in the ballroom dim. The strongest light source came from the pale light of the Twin Moons above...

The applause from the crowd made everyone bow as the lights went back on. Harry and Hermione bowed too.

“And you said you can’t dance!” Hermione said

“I – I seem to be good at it... I’m not sure” Harry chuckled

He never had fun in his life dancing like that... he felt so happy.

“Do you mind waiting for me while I get a drink?” Hermione asked politely

“Sure, I don’t mind” Harry nodded

She smiled and disappeared into the crowd beyond.

Without hesitation, Harry turned on his heel and walked the other way looking for Rapticon Sr.

Luckily, he saw him drinking with a black mage, a red mage and gunner.

“– and then that’s when I said ‘Then read it and tell me what it is!’” said Rapticon Sr. as Harry approached.

“Professor!” Harry said as he tapped Rapticon Sr. on the back

“Harry!” said the raptor “Why don’t you join us? I’m just having a nice glass of wine with these nice fellow chaps!”

“Now is not the time” said Harry, he lowered his voice “I found Hermione”

“What? That’s good!”

“No,”

“That’s bad?” Rapticon Sr. looked at Harry with a doubtful look

“No, I mean there’s something wrong with her!”

“What do you mean?” said Rapticon Sr.

“She doesn’t know me, at all!” said Harry

Rapticon Sr. looked at Harry with confusion

“But Hermione did come in the book with us, right?” he shrugged
“She went in F.F.O. with us, remember? Because she must be aware that she is in a fictional world because I recall Ron saying the book sucked her in!”

“Hey guys,” said the voice of Ron, who just arrived

“Ron!” Harry said, grabbing him by the shoulders “I found Hermione!”

Ron’s eyes widened

“That’s good!”

“She doesn’t remember a thing about us or Hogwarts!”

“That’s bad!”

“No, I mean there’s something – I’m just repeating what I said two paragraph’s ago!” Harry shook his head “Look, I met her, I even danced with her but she doesn’t know anything about me or Hogwarts!”

“Bloody hell, are you serious?” Ron rubbed his chin “Didn’t Professor Raptor stated that people who enter the contents of the book are aware that they are outsiders of this world?”

Harry nodded

“That doesn’t make any sense... oh bollocks, my head hurts” Ron rubbed his head

“You saw Hermione enter the book, right?” Harry asked

“I’m not sure but I’m positive she’s here... I can feel it!” said Ron

“Me too, Ron but why is she under amnesia then?”

“Maybe she had a special case” said Rapticon Sr. “Anything can happen”

Rapticon Sr. was right... anything can happen in this world... Hermione being oblivious of her real identity might make this journey harder than Harry thought it would be... they really need to find Accula... he would know what to do considering this is his world.

“So what do we do now?” Ron asked

"We kidnap the General's daughter" said Harry

There was a long pause.

"Are you mad?" Ron spat "Kidnapping Hermione under the nose of her father! I've heard stories how heavily guarded she is!"

"I didn't really mean 'kidnap' I mean bringing her with us to find a way to get out of here and go home and what other choice do we have?" Harry said "Even if I walked up to her and asked her to join us she probably wouldn't accept! And if she did accept her father wouldn't allow it!"

"Harry's got a point, Ron" Rapticon Sr. nodded "But how can we get to her without getting into that much trouble... and when will we do it?"

Harry smirked

"We'll do it tomorrow... I'll try to set up an appointment with her – I'm right now getting along with this Hermione – and after pulling a few strings, we can take her and find Accula! He might now what to do"

"That's the most farfetched plan ever" said Ron, shaking his head "Can we pull it off?"

"Maybe so but if it means getting us off this place in one piece then I'd take it" said Rapticon Sr. "And who knows? Maybe along the way we can get Hermione's memory back"

"Fair enough" said Ron "But can we at least enjoy the party instead of planning something that might cost us our lives?"

"Sure," said Harry "But let me introduce you to Hermione first... same with you, Professor"

"Fine," said Rapticon Sr., standing up "I always like meeting 'new' people" he added with sarcasm.

READ AND REVIEW, PLEASE! Thanks in advance!

Chapter Nine

The Big Shots

“Wait,” said Ron

Harry and Rapticon Sr. pulled to a full stop before entering into the throng of partygoers

“Is it possible Hermione might be under the spell of someone else?” Ron explained

“I don’t know where you’re getting to, Ron” Harry shook his head

“No – wait! I mean, I’m positive this is the Hermione we all know. Not a ‘character’ based on her but what if she was like under a curse or something? We all ended up somewhere when we got here so what are the odds of her ending up at a dark wizard’s clutches?”

“Ron is right on that, Harry” Rapticon Sr. rubbed his chin “I’m also leaning towards to the fact that this is the Hermione from Hogwarts but Ron’s theory on her being hoodwinked by some character when she got here is a possibility...”

“B-But she’s not hoodwinked, isn’t she?” Harry breathed

“Don’t worry,” said Ron “I was just pointing out the possible scenarios so we can be ready for them” he patted Harry on the shoulder “If Hermione is under a spell by some wizard what would we do? Help her of course!”

Harry knew that Ron’s correct. Whatever happens, they’ll pull through till the end... it’s always like that. He nodded to Ron and led them to the crowd in search of Hermione.

It wasn’t too long until they saw the General’s daughter come up to Harry holding two wine glasses.

“Hey!” Hermione squeaked “I’ve been looking for you! I got drinks”

“Thank you,” Harry bowed and took a glass “Err... Hermione, meet my two new friends”

Harry turned to see Ron looking at Hermione with an open jaw. He couldn't blame him... she is pretty and the contrast from her past look pushed that fact even further.

Hermione bowed her head with a smile and extended her hand

“Please to meet you – er...”

“R-Ron Weasley” he spoke taking her hand and shaking it which made Hermione give him a peculiar look

“Ahem,” Rapticon Sr. whispered to Ron “In a royal or political gathering, you kiss the hand”

Everything registered to Ron and pecked Hermione's knucklebone.

“Pleasure is all mine, ma'am” Ron made his funny grin

Harry chuckled. Ron had the crush on Hermione back then and he wondered if he still had it... though for some reason, he wished he kissed Hermione's hand too.

“And you are?” Hermione asked Rapticon Sr.

“Dimitri Rapticon Raptor Sr., ma'am Grangeré” he made a graceful bow “I beg your pardon but I don't feel worthy to kiss the hand of an important figure in today's society”

He winked to Harry as Hermione giggled.

“I understand, monsieur. It's a pleasure to meet you”

“The pleasure is all mine, mademoiselle” replied the raptor

“Merci” she bowed

“Since when did this world have French?” Harry asked Rapticon Sr.

“Accula is fond of the French language, Harry” he looked at him “For him, It would be a sin to not include it in his literary works”

“I’m sorry but did just say ‘Accula’?” Hermione asked

“Yes he did!” Harry said excitedly “Does his name ring a bell to you? Anything?”

“Well, of course his name rings a thousand bells to me” said Hermione

Harry’s heart lifted. Hermione’s memory is coming back...

“He’s the Archmage of Skyld” she stated making Harry’s heart sink

“Woah, woah, woah, woah!” Rapticon Sr. said giving the last “woah” an oomph in the delivery “Hold the owl post... Archmage of Skiled?”

“Skyld” Hermione corrected, pronouncing it correctly “It’s like ‘sky’ with an ‘ld’ in the end”

“Yeah... anyways, you just said Accula –“

“Archmage Accula to you” Hermione crossed her arms “He’s a respected man in Atrynömunal”

“Fine,” said Rapticon Sr. “Correct me if I’m wrong but you just said Archmage Accula is the Archmage of Skyld?”

Hermione nodded with a smile

Rapticon Sr. looked at Harry with a hopeful gleam in his eyes.

“Skyld?” he asked

“Skyld it is” Harry nodded

The feeling of rushed adrenaline came into Harry's veins. Thanks to Hermione, they already know the location of Accula, the key to their trip home. If only they can get Hermione's memory back to normal...

"Er... I can't help myself but I assume you're going to Skyld?" Hermione asked

"It looks like it" Ron said "Does it?" he looked at Harry

"Umm... not really" Harry lied "We were just wondering where the Archmage lived, that's all"

"Oh," Hermione nodded "If you're planning to go there, it is almost impossible to do so"

"What?" Harry and Rapticon Sr. said in impassive unison

"There's a war going on there, remember?" Hermione said at once

Then it hit Harry like a bottle of Ether on his head.

"But the City of Airships AKA Skyld where 'airships rule the skies' have been having skirmishes against the Natsi Anarchy around the Western Continent and it's been going on for months now..."

The words that Yumi said echoed in Harry's mind... entering the airship metropolis would be difficult...

"You said it's almost impossible..." Ron said "So that means we – I mean – anyone has the possibility in entering it, right?"

"Yes, but you have to take an airship to the city. Skyld is already strict with on-foot travelers considering that they might be spies of the enemy. Airships are safer now since all airships must enter a docking bay where thorough inspections take place and they never fail" she looked at Harry "My father was there two weeks ago and he told me that the Archmage's Sanctum is the safest place in the city"

"Where can one get airships?" Rapticon Sr. asked

“There are many airship docks in the city... this is the capital of Atrynömunal” Hermione stated in a matter-of-factly voice

“Excuse me, ma’am – Harry,” said Rapticon Sr., grabbing him by the shoulder and dragging him into a nearby buffet table

“What now?” Harry asked

“This is the plan” he said in a low voice “Don’t tell anyone! Except for Ron – anyways, we know now where our missing friends, right?”

Harry nodded

“We have Hermione here... all we need to do is try to let her go with us to Skyld and find Accula... hopefully, he’ll have his memory intact”

“But, sir... you know we can’t just... leave” said Harry

“What do you mean?”

“You know, we have established some – er – reputation in the city and we can’t just leave like that and if anyone finds out we took Hermione” he gulped “we might be in a pickle”

“A pickle I’d dive in, my boy” said Rapticon Sr. “I know it’s risky but what other choice do we have? If we leave, there’s no turning back! If we find Accula, he’ll find a way to get out of this place and poof! All of our charges (if any) will disappear like that” he snapped

“I know but...” Harry felt uneasy. For some reason, living in a fantasy world grew on him. He made new friends, he’s doing well in his job class, he became a war hero and feels like he can do more... he felt like that it would be best to leave Atrynömunal with the best last impression

“But what?”

“– but I don’t want to do anything... bad” Harry said

Rapticon Sr. sighed

"I know, Harry... look, we can take this slowly but if an occasion comes when we have to do something 'rash'... you know what to do"

Harry agreed.

"So tomorrow, we try to take Hermione with us and find an airship dock... I think Yumi might know where it is... then we try to find a way to Skyld and meet up with Accula" Rapticon Sr. spoke in a very low voice now "Tell Ron after the party, okay?"

"Okay"

"Good, now let's enjoy the party" Rapticon Sr. gestured his head to the crowd "and hopefully extract something useful to us in the future..."

The two moved towards the crowd of partygoers as the music started to play a fast jazz tune. For a split second, Harry bumped into a man with auburn hair.

"Hey, watch it!"

"Says the guy who's blocking the way!" Harry answered back straightening his glasses. Rapticon Sr. gave Harry an alarming shaking of the head.

"Hey, we've got reasons why we stay in places" said the auburn haired man

"Don't we all?" said an Asian-esque person with thick spiky hair, who approached from behind "What's going on, Elias?"

Harry saw that these two men wore identical suits of black pinstriped tuxedos

"I can take care of it, Shen" the man named Elias rolled his eyes on the Asian

“Children isn’t your forte, you know that” the man named Shen smirked at him as he sipped from his wineglass

Elias? Shen?

The names were awfully familiar... as if he heard them before.

“I was raised in an orphanage, so what?” said Elias, shrugging his shoulders. He then looked at Harry “Listen, kid –“

“I’m no kid –“ Harry retaliated but was cut off by Rapticon Sr. who grabbed him by the shoulder.

“Yes – Yes! H-Harry was just being silly not knowing the way” he gave a toothy grin to Shen and Elias “You know, with the party everywhere –“ he waved his arms around gesturing to the crowd “– and the drinks, food, etcetera, etcetera...”

Harry rolled his eyes. He can stand for himself... but then again, he shouldn’t be causing any trouble for the time being...

Elias and Shen looked at each other with questioning looks.

“Um... you do know who ‘green-orbs’ bumped into, huh?” Elias challenged, crossing his arms in a boastful way.

“I don’t think ‘green-orbs’ really care” Harry spat only to be squeezed on the shoulder by Rapticon Sr.’s claws

“Burn.” chuckled Shen as he sipped his wineglass

“Shut up!” said Elias loudly, cutting the air “I can handle this!”

Before Shen could answer, the voice of a female ceased the tension, temporarily.

“My, my... Elias Vex, you disappoint me!”

The new arrival was arguable one of the most beautiful people Harry has ever seen in Atrynömunal. She had the Caucasian look on her

face and her three ponytails that extended at the back of her brown hair gave her the unusual look for a woman. Unlike Elias and Shen, she was wearing a black dress.

“Dammit, Julia” smirked Elias “Looks like you caught me on my best mood” he added with sarcasm.

“Considering how you’re usually the lazy type, I’m surprised” she walked passed him and saw Harry “And you are?”

Harry was reluctant to answer that since it’s almost in his instinct to be very shy among very pretty women unless he knew them very well.

“Shy, aren’t you?” she winked “Don’t worry, you’re not the first shy man I’ve met”

“Julia, don’t you have work to do?” Elias said, thumbing the crowd behind them “Cause I want a few words with Mr. green-orbs over here”

“Mr. Green-orbs?” Julia raised an eyebrow “Never have a Blumetritt has heard such lame nicknames... especially from your standards, Elias. Losing the Merc touch?”

Harry’s eyes widened.

Mercs

...there is an infamous group called the Mercs, kupo. They are like a rebel sort of group who work for the highest bidder...

Remembering Moco’s words, he remembered the names: Elias Vex, Shen-Ku Yu, Julia Blumetritt... could the whole Merc group be in this party right now?

Dammit, I got on their bad side!

The Mercs were known to be very dangerous and ending up on the wrong side would get you in big trouble. A gaping hole formed inside

Harry's stomach and right now, Harry hoped he can grab the near punch bowl and dunk his head in it for not shutting his mouth.

"J-Just be QUIET!" yelled Elias, who quickly regained his cool by making an apologetically brief cough and fixed his tie "I had worse for today, thank you"

Julia Blumetritt giggled.

"Yes, I know... look, if you need any back-up, I'm right over..." she pointed at the distance "there."

"Don't worry, Jules" said Elias in a mocking the voice of a well-to-do man "You don't have to tell me where you are for I've found you... in my heart –"

"Oh shut up!" said Julia coolly as she left them.

"Gets her every time" chuckled Elias

"She can take you seriously at times" Shen said

"As my mother can when I told her I'm going to join the Mercs" replied Elias "...now where was I? Oh, yes..."

He looked at Harry with that smug grin of his.

"You know, boy –"

"Harry"

"Sorry?"

"Harry Potter" said Harry, brushing Rapticon Sr.'s hand off his shoulder "Look, I don't want any trouble or anything... I-I apologize"

It was being marked or leaving this place alive and Harry thought of the best choice.

After a long pause, Elias broke into a laugh. Harry felt mildly affronted by this.

“Y-You seriously don’t know who we are, do you?” said Elias, recovering from his laugh “Seriously, you’re new around here, right?”

“Just nod” said Rapticon Sr. from behind

Harry nodded

“No wonder,” said Elias, shrugging “Look, kid –“

“Harry”

“Whatever!” Elias said flailing his arms wildly “I’m going to go easy on yah and put this thing behind us!” he then closed in on Harry face to face “But if you get on my way again” he chuckled “I’ll make sure you’ll see something your green eyes can save for a lifetime”

Harry gulped.

“By the way, the name’s –“

“Elias Vex” Harry finished his sentence “I – I know about you and the Mercs... I just don’t know what you people looked like, that’s all”

“Eh, he’s been on the books” he nodded “I like a kid who keeps his mind on the gen-info these days”

Suddenly, a nine-note ring played. Wondering where it came from, Harry turned to Rapticon Sr. who shrugged.

“Excuse me for a second” said Elias, who picked up a cellphone from his pocket which confirmed the source of the ring tone.

“I – I thought phones weren’t invented at this place?” Harry wondered remembering Moco’s oblivious response when he mentioned a phone when he arrived here.

“They aren’t” said a voice from behind

Harry and Rapticon Sr. jumped and saw that it was Hermione followed close by Ron.

"Phones are newly found technology in Atrynömunal" she continued "It's not surprising for one to now know that because of the technology being new. So far, only the rich and the ones with good connections with others have phones. I hear they come in portable ones but the only people who have that are the Mercs"

Elias came back folding his phone and placing it in his pocket.

"Done, now where was I?"

"Speaking of which" Hermione said, frowning at Elias

Elias paused for a moment at the sight of Hermione and smirked

"Ah... Grangeré" he bowed

"Vex" Hermione replied with a slight bitter tone

"Didn't expect you to come near me by five feet, I see"

"We've been through this" Hermione rolled her eyes as she shook her head "You're the charming man from the Mercs and I'm the General's daughter! It. Can't. Fit."

"Hermione, I'm shocked!" mocked Elias "Since when was there a spark between us? We've been friends since five years ago. Are you implying something?"

"Nothing." Hermione shook her head "It's just that the last time we spoke you were inclined to spike me with some of your magical tea and I don't think it bode well with my standards"

"Wait, what?" shook the head of Harry

"I see you've got acquainted with my friend, Harry Potter and Rapticon Sr. Raptor" Hermione pointed out

“Yeah, no need to point that out” Elias waved a hand “Look, I’m glad we’re talking again but I really got to go” he looked back and saw that Shen was already away “See? Even my companion left me”

“Enjoy the night, Elias” Hermione grinned at him

“Night and Harry...” he looked at Harry “Take care of her real good”

Before registering anything Elias Vex said, he left.

“Oooh! I hate him!” Hermione groaned “He gets on my nerves!”

“Why so?” Ron asked “He seems to be a nice guy”

“Oh, believe me” Hermione looked at Ron, smiling “You don’t know Elias Vex like the way I do”

“And you’re saying?” Harry asked

Hermione shook her head

“I can’t say, of course. That’s private!” Hermione said

“You can tell me –” Harry made a quick stop over there

I forgot, she can’t tell me anything that easy anymore...

“Sorry?”

“Never mind” Harry said sadly

Hermione made a sigh.

“Anyways, I want you, Rapticon Sr. and Ron to see something”

She took Harry by the wrist and told the latter to follow her. After walking a few steps, they were standing up on one of the higher viewing platforms, which is taller by a foot from ground zero.

“What are you trying to show us?” Ron asks

“After that little incident back there, I can tell you guys are not really city folk... from what place do you guys come from?” Hermione looked at them

“Gysahl Plains” said Harry at once remembering the place where he met Moco for the first time.

“Mog Village?” Hermione nodded “Moogles from that place aren’t that much of travelers so now I can see why...”

“Me too” Rapticon Sr. nodded

“Me three” Ron followed

“Oh, so you three know each other for a long time now... um, well – anyways, I’ll give you some facts and figures on ‘The Big Shots’ of the city” Hermione turned towards the crowd.

Pointing at a group of people, she said

“Do you see that man over there? The one with the combed silver hair? Yeah, his name is Drake Reynald. The Merc leader”

Like Elias and Shen, Drake Reynald wore the same type of tux except he wore a pin on his chest which had an emblem on it. Harry couldn’t make out of it due to the distance but from what he can see, Reynald looks like a respectable man with his silver hair shining from the light.

“Silver hair in a fantasy-themed world...” muttered Rapticon Sr. “How cliché of you, Accula... how cliché of you”

“That man in the poncho is the White Council’s ‘errand boy’ as people tease him” Hermione joked “But he gets the job done. His name is Jacob Tristan” she then turned and pointed to another group of people “That woman is Dame McGonagatt”

“We know her” Harry said “We had a little run-in with a few bangaas and she was able to bring justice at our favor”

“Really?” said Hermione in amazement “I never knew that! She’s always the won with the discipline... oh, that man over there is Zeiji Hildasan – he’s like the spokesman of my father and he’s very good at it. My father told me that Zeiji is like a brother to him now... and I have to admit, no best friend can be as loyal as Mr. Hildasan”

Zeiji Hildasan had a thin but above average face. His pointed nose gave him the look of a sophisticated man. His brown eyes surveyed the crowd as he helped himself with a clubhouse sandwich.

“That couple are the Hudgens. They are the richest family in Gergone, a city way up north from here... in my personal opinion – don’t tell anyone – they’re braggarts” she giggled nervously “Don’t tell anyone I said that, okay! They really brag about their riches to the point that I had to cry back then whenever they visited my home!”

Harry laughed

“Don’t worry, Hermione. You’re secret is safe with us”

“I’ve seen worse braggarts back at Hogwarts” said Ron in a low voice so only Harry could hear.

“Over there is the Royal Council” Hermione continued as she nodded to a group of people sitting on the high table “They are like the senate of the city... they pretty much decides whether the king’s decisions are good or not...”

“Who is who in the Royal Council?” Harry asked

“I think you already know Diana Glacius... umm – the tall man over there is Norman Quagmire. The short one with glasses over there is Relo Perkins, he’s from Ibarra so you can see that he’s really happy about the liberation” she then pointed to a man who has resemblance of a Spaniard “That man is Vector Alonzo. Apart from Ma’am Glacius, I’ve known him since childhood since my father brought me to the castle where Uncle Vector lived to play with his daughters”

She looked at Harry and Ron.

“If you’re wondering who they are, there are three of them. Nicola, Kate and Kristina so if you want to meet them that’s going to be a problem since they’re on vacation at Coneria with their cousins” Hermione said jokingly

Ron chuckled

“Since when did we showed signs of interest to women?” he said making a nervous smirk

“I’m just kidding!” Hermione giggled “Anywho, you know Olaf Pole... then there’s Quentin Vernet, the oldest and wisest Council member and umm... oh, where’s the seventh one?”

Harry looked on as Hermione counted off the Council members she pointed out.

“Looks like the last one isn’t here yet... I bet he hasn’t arrived yet or he’s probably in lost in the crowd” Hermione said

“Who’s the seventh?” Ron ask

“Oh, I doubt you’d like him... he’s the most critical of the lot and is very ‘edgy’ on everything the Council makes! But in my opinion, he’s the smartest of the group... even compared to Sir Quentin Vernet!” said Hermione

“Seriously, who is he?” Rapticon Sr. asked

“His name is...” said Hermione

- - -

Some stories above the bustling party, the dark corridors of the castle echoed due to a soft conversation in one of the castle’s many rooms.

“Are you sure of this information, my good sir?” said a drawling voice in the dark

Another dark figure smacked the first man in the face making him whimper.

“Don’t you dare question the information I’ve given to you, Scipio! From what I’ve heard, you’re not really doing a good job playing the puppet master of His Majesty King Bedeviere”

“B – But I am, sir!” Scipio said “If it wasn’t for me, those Biestavale pawns wouldn’t know anything about the Mecha-Fiends!”

“Then where is my victory?” said the large figure to Scipio “If I remembered correctly, I lost in that battle of chess back at Ibarra and from my reports it states that there was a number of spies who was able to break into our ranks and find out about the beachhead’s defense positions... so saying that you’ve done a good job is strictly and understatement for your part... Am I correct so far?”

Scipio made a small whimper.

“I – I am so sorry, my liege! I promise I won’t make a blunder again!”

“You better not!” said the figure “The boy will be displeased to hear that Ibarra has been taken from him”

“NO!” yelled Scipio “Don’t tell Master Rivoreld nor to Master Schneider Please! I’ll make it up to you! Anything!”

The figure raised an eyebrow.

“Fair enough, this information states the location of a possible citizen who has a blood of a Summoner. We need that person to go through with the Dark Lord’s plans and Rivoreld can’t do anything about it until we get that Summoner”

He then walked to Scipio and grabbed him by the collar.

“Understand?”

“Y – Yes, Snape”

“Sir Severus Snape, to you” said Snape, dropping Scipio down at the ground “I must leave to the party. I don’t want anyone to use my absence as a tool for compromise shenanigans... I am part of the Royal Council after all”

- - -

“His name is –“

“Hermione!”

Hermione was cut off by a plump woman. Her fair complexion and frizzy hair was very familiar...

“Professor Sprout?” Harry and Ron said in unison

The woman who looked like Sprout walked towards Hermione and kissed her on the cheeks.

“My, my! The last time I saw you, you were feasting on your birthday cake on late-summer’s eve!” she said “Look at you, you’ve grown beautifully!”

“Thank you, madam Sprout” Hermione bowed “Oh, Madam Sprout, I want you to meet these fine men” she gestured Sprout to Harry, Ron and Rapticon Sr. “This is Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Dimitri Rapticon Raptor Sr. – who you can call Rapticon Sr. for short”

“Greetings, madam” the three greeted

“Pleasure to meet you three” smiled Sprout “Hermione loves making new friends” she laughed “she never stops to be on her friendly side!”

Hermione giggled.

"I learned to value friendship from the best" she said giving Sprout a look of gratefulness

Sprout held the cheek of Hermione.

"You're a sweet child... there's nothing for me to teach you!"

From this point, Harry could see Hermione's role in the world of Atrynömunal... she's the General's daughter, she's famous and very friendly to many... he's pretty confident that this is the Hermione he knows, not some emulation of the Hermione he knows in the real world... so what was his place in the world if he wasn't oblivious of his surroundings?

"Now I must go and tend to greet your father" said Sprout "I know seeing his aunt will make him grin from ear to ear"

Hermione smiled as Sprout left the scene.

"That's Madam Sprout." She said "When I was little, she took care of me and my cousins when my father would leave us at the castle and go on in meetings... she taught me everything about life and such since I never had a mother to do that for me..."

"You're mother died?" Ron asked

"I rather not talk about it..." Hermione said looking down at the ground "I never knew my mother. But there are some things I can't understand"

"Like what?" Harry said with concern

"Like I said, I rather not talk about it..." Hermione then made a smile "so let's enjoy the party!"

And so they did...

- - -

“Harry!” Ron said “I think I got a lead on what Hermione does everyday”

“Don’t worry” Harry said as they left the castle and into the Greater District “I told her I’d meet her at the Castle Gardens for a little chit-chat”

After the whole run-in with the Merces thing and getting to know who’s who in the world of Atrynömunal, Harry asked Hermione if he could spend time with her for lunch tomorrow at the castle. Hermione accepted and assumed he was asking her out (much to Ron’s chagrin) but denied such intentions by Harry. Afterwards, the party continued all night with dancing, singing and celebration until the clock stroke midnight which meant that Harry and the rest should leave for tomorrow’s events...

“That’s good,” said Ron, yawning “Wow, I hope everything goes through because one false step and we’re going to be on the run from then on...”

That troubled Harry... could he trust Rapticon Sr. to let this operation push through and with the thought of success in the end? It seemed absurd to kidnap the General’s daughter in the castle without knowledge of the security in the place... it was almost a suicidal mission.

“Aren’t you scarred, Ron?” Harry asked “Of – you know – tomorrow?”

Ron pursed his lips

“Yes, I am... but what else is there for us to do? We know where Accula is, we even know where Hermione is... we need them both to get home... and seeing Hermione’s status right now, it would be hard to bring her along”

Ron took a deep breath.

“Even if anything goes wrong, what’s there to lose?” said Ron

Ron made a point over there... but what about the friends he made? They're nice enough to become his best friends, what will they think of him if they found out he kidnapped an important figure of their society? And his guild status... everyone will hate him.

Ugh, I feel like I'm at my fourth year again!

"I wouldn't mind leaving the place but I rather leave on the condition that I'm not infamous" Harry admitted

"We all want that" said Rapticon Sr. "Hell, tonight, we get our cards ready for what's coming"

"But, sir..." Ron gulped "Do we even know how the security works in the castle?"

Rapticon Sr. shrugged.

"I really don't know but I have an idea"

"What is it then?"

"I was talking to Olaf back at the party and he gave me an idea how the castle is guarded... he told me that the Castle Gardens are not really guarded by guards – I know, Harry. We got caught the other night but that was during the briefing so it's a no brainer that the place had to be heavily guarded from spies"

That answered Harry's question.

"Anyways, the place isn't heavily guarded because there are no entrances to the castle from the gardens except through the main gate which is heavily guarded" Rapticon Sr. continued "so my plan is this... Harry, you ask Hermione for you to tour around the castle... me and Ron will find a way in (Olaf says the castle is off-limits to outsiders unless one has business over there) which I'll get into detail later

"The next detail to add is the Majestic Hall... the throne of the King"

“Don’t tell me that we’re going to go there?” Harry asked

“Yes, you need to go there. I know it sounds risky but I overheard Madam Fluesky – the castle’s resident gossip goddess – saying that Scipio, the King’s advisor won’t allow any security near the throne and the King... I’m not really sure about that ‘cause a throne room with no guards? Like what the hell? Anyways, that’s all I can find. I’ll put everything into detail as we arrive at Moco’s”

- - -

As the party of Harry left the castle, inside the castle walls there was Hermione sitting alone at one of the many hallways of the structure.

She looked at her hands and made a deep breath.

“I... don’t get it... every time I’m around them I feel like I know them...” she sighed “And Harry... he looks very familiar... could it be?” she looked to the left and saw at the end of the corridor the crowd dispersing to the entrance hall.

Shaking her head, Hermione stood up and walked down the corridor towards the crowd.

“I’m just being silly... that boy died two years ago – I’m just being silly”

Hermione then left into the crowd to look for her father.

From this chapter, you have seen the pieces that will play in the board of this yet-to-be grueling epic of our heroes and heroines and from what we’ve known so far... each piece will have to play a role in the game.

Chapter Ten

The Majestic Situation

The nine o'clock morning sun shone across the castle grounds. Today is a new day since everyone is happy about the recent victory over the liberation of Ibarra. Survivors were able to go back to their loved ones and enjoy their company. Politicians congratulated each other of the success. Guilds and their masters continued their work as always, being better than before.

Harry Potter, Rapticon Sr. Raptor and Ron Weasley weren't up for the postwar festivities. Today was an iconic and important day for them. They have decided that they have no choice but to go with the kidnapping. Hermione is needed in order for them to get out of the world they live right now. But the task is not going to be easy.

"Do we need to get over the plan?" asked Harry as the three, Yumi and Moco walked at the castle entrance square. A large clearing where a fountain stood in the center with the castle entrance built up beyond.

"Like I said last night" said Rapticon Sr. "You get the girl, we make your escape through His Majesty's throne room"

"I can't believe you're doing this, kupol!" Moco said

Ever since he overheard the three talked about the plan, Moco has been paranoid about the possible fallout against them if they were unsuccessful. Every time, he kept on nagging them to pull out their plans and just find a cleaner way to get the General's daughter.

"Sorry, Moco" said Harry, turning to the Moogle "But we have to do this. Look, if were caught, we will admit that you two have no connection about this whole plan"

"But you are a war hero!" said Moco "Why throw all of that away?"

During the layout of plans, Harry has reflected on the results of the "mission". It's pretty obvious that things will not go right for them in

the end whether they are successful or not. People will start asking questions and pretty soon, everyone will know they kidnapped the General's daughter!

Hermione's father will eat us alive...

But Harry has decided that he'll go through with it. No matter what happens, he'll deal with the consequences. Atrynömunal is a beautiful place but he has to go to a place where he can call "home". So he'll do anything to go back to Hogwarts no matter what it takes.

"Moco," Ron said "We all have decided that this is the only way to go back to our home, Hogwarts! We wished there was another way but we can't find any"

"How about asked her father to take Hermione along with you for a trip, kupo?"

"He would never allow that" said Yumi

"But Harry can't go through this grueling quest, kupo!" Moco said "Just think of the people you've impressed, Harry! Please, I beg of you to find a much pleasant way to do this, kupo!"

"Moco," Harry bent down to Moco "I have made my decision. All I ask from you is to trust me, okay?"

Harry patted the head of the Moogles. He smiled at the concern of Moco... he was the first being Harry met when he arrived here.

"But... but" said Moco

"Look, I don't even know why you invited us here" said Yumi

Rapticon Sr. was the one to speak this time.

"We invited you because we need you"

Yumi winced. Harry deduced she knew what Rapticon Sr. meant.

“You need us to do what?” Yumi asked

Rapticon Sr. pointed down at the castle.

“The throne room,” said Rapticon Sr. “is mysteriously unguarded by the Royal Guard of the castle. After we kidnap –“

“Fetch” Harry said

“Fetch Hermione,” said Rapticon Sr. irritably “We head to the Throne Room and –“

“And what?” Yumi asked

“The King has obviously a quick escape route in the throne room, right?”

“Well, yeah. That’s true, kupo” said Moco “Every time a national crisis occurs, the King goes into a secret passage somewhere around the throne room. From there, it leads him to a safe zone far away from the castle, kupo”

“And where could that be?” asked Rapticon Sr.

“That, we don’t know” said Moco

“Dammit,” Rapticon Sr. swore “There could more than a thousand possible exits from the throne room”

“That’s not true” said Yumi “My uncle is a thief guild executive officer,”

“You have chain of command in that guild?” Ron asked before he could stop himself

“It’s a lot sophisticated than you think” said Yumi coolly “Anyway, I overheard my uncle talking about the exits of the King’s secret passage way”

“And?” asked Harry

“He, he said something about the Citizen District... an old house”

“What else?”

“Nothing” Yumi bit her lower lip “He caught me and scolded me for snooping around”

“So that’s it then” Rapticon Sr. punched his palm “We need Yumi and Moco to station Choco – attached to a cart – at an alley near the district square just beside Celes Hotel”

“What!” Yumi and Moco said in unison

“Are you crazy?” Yumi asked

“Almost,” said Rapticon Sr. calmly “But don’t worry, just stay there and when we come out of god knows where, we will meet you there”

“But –“ Yumi said

“Dammit, Yumi just trust me!” Rapticon Sr. said, almost yelling “Look, I know you don’t want any involvement in this but Harry, Ron and I want to get out of this place as much as how you feel about this stunt”

“But you can’t be serious”

“No buts!” Rapticon Sr. raised a finger “If we all get caught, I will say that I threatened you. You two will not be detained for any civil unrest, treason or that crap, got it?”

Yumi and Moco reluctantly nodded.

“Good...” Rapticon Sr. paused “So yeah, when we get out of the other side of the King’s secret route with Hermione, we will go up to you, hide in the cart and you will find your way back at Moco’s”

“Won’t that jeopardize my innocence, kupo?” asked Moco

“Like I said, you will be under the pretense that I am threatening the both of you” Rapticon Sr. looked at Moco “We will let Hermione wear

a poncho with a hood one to make her look like some old nanny. No one will notice her”

“But what if my father interferes?” Moco asked worriedly

“He’ll be at work the whole time, he won’t notice a thing” said Harry

“And the time everyone will realize we are gone with Hermione, we’ll be on our way to Skyld on an airship” said Rapticon Sr.

“Uh... what airship?” Ron asked

“There is a business port a few blocks from Moco’s place” Rapticon Sr. pointed southwest “It’s a private port so with the proper payments, we can get in and grab ourselves an airship”

“You won’t be – er – hijacking anything, are you?” Yumi asked

“No” said Rapticon Sr. “I am confident that the moment we leave, the kingdom will pull up a massive search and before they could consider airship escapes, we’ll be long gone”

There was then a long, long pause.

“You can come with us... if you want” Harry asked uncomfortably to Yumi and Moco

“Haha, no thank you” said Yumi “I think it is best that I should avoid situations I can’t handle”

Harry looked at Moco.

“I would love to, kupo. But only if it were in much better circumstances, I’m sorry”

“Don’t be” said Harry, smiling “Don’t worry too much! Nothing has happened yet”

“But it will,” said Yumi “And I can’t stand the image of the three of you arrested for kidnap!”

"Your concern is noted, Yumi" Rapticon Sr. held her shoulder "But we need you and Moco to trust us. You can do that, can't you?"

Yumi looked at Rapticon Sr.'s eyes and nodded.

"Good" said Rapticon Sr. "Now let's get over the plan, shall we?"

The four left the square and into a hotel where Harry, Ron and Rapticon Sr. slept the past night. They were too sleepy to go back to Moco's they rented an inn. They went back to the room and closed the door shut. Rapticon Sr. checked if anyone was outside and with a click of the door's handle, they were safe to discuss.

"We have no neighbors on the room beside us and in front of us" said Rapticon Sr. "We'll be safe. Now let's break it down"

The plan was divided into four parts: the infiltration, the kidnap, the escape and the hiding.

"Infiltration:" said Rapticon Sr., raising one finger "Harry is invited to have lunch with Hermione Grangeré, the General's daughter in the palace gardens. Ron and I, however, aren't invited so entry to the castle is impossible unless we have business there"

Rapticon Sr. and Ron's entry to the castle was a hard obstacle to achieve. Unless they had an appointment with someone inside the castle, they can't go anywhere in the place. Ron suggested they pose as bodyguards but Harry says Hermione promised him that his name will appear in the manifest of visitors on that day. Rapticon Sr. and Ron have no time to ask their names to be in it.

"We have out ruled bodyguards, detained men, tourist guides, etcetera" said Rapticon Sr. "There are some options but our best bet is to pose as employees of the castle"

"Who are all working inside the palace" said Yumi "I doubt anyone is out of the castle. Who will you grab?"

Rapticon Sr. smirked.

“The gardener”

“True,” said Moco “The palace gardeners always go out of the castle grounds to tend to the topiaries along the palace walls”

“How can you grab them without notice?” asked Yumi

“Olaf told me that two gardeners always tend to the flora of the castle’s walls every two or three hours” Rapticon Sr. made an imaginary wall with his finger “Me and Ron will come up to them and ask for ‘garden’ advice. We lure them to our ‘house’ which in fact is an alley. And then when we have them there, we incapacitate them and take their equipment”

“How about identification?” Yumi asked

“Gardeners won’t have any. They work for a private business under the command of Diana Glacius. It’s amusing how no one knows of this detail. Anyone could just play dress up and enter the castle undetected” said Rapticon Sr.

“You connected stuff, didn’t you?” Yumi grinned

“Yes, when Olaf told me this, that’s when I tried to connect some few loose ends and bam! Ron and I have a ticket way in”

“But what about you, kupo?” Moco asked Rapticon Sr. “Your appearance might compromise your position since you are a war hero!”

“True but I’ve read up on the employees last night that gardeners are equipped with gas masks. I’ll just put it on and say I ran into an Ochu seedling and I can enter the castle. Ron won’t have a problem entering”

“But I don’t get one thing” said Yumi “Why do we need to let you two in?”

“Harry can’t bring Hermione out of the palace by himself” said Ron
“He needs inside help if he can extract Hermione out of the palace”

“And we are the outside help?” asked Moco

“Yep” Rapticon Sr. nodded

“Anyway,” said Rapticon Sr. “Ron and I will make our way to the gardens and I will give Harry the signal”

Rapticon Sr. lifted two fingers

“Kidnap. After the signal, Harry will ask Hermione if he could have a tour around the castle. Harry, what will you request for?”

“A look into the throne room” said Harry

“And when she declines?”

“I’ll ask her to go the trophy room” said Harry “It’s the closest room to the throne from what Hermione said”

“From there, Ron and I will follow Harry. When he brings her to the trophy room, we’ll take her and proceed to the throne room” said Rapticon Sr.

“How about the King?” asked Yumi “You do know he stays there twenty-four-seven, right?”

“Yes, we are very aware of that” said Rapticon Sr. “That is why Ron has fire-starters”

“You have fire-starters?” Yumi looked at Ron in amazement

“Only for Dragoons” said Ron “Anyway, we decided to plant them somewhere around the castle. That way, things will be a little restless so our escape will be an easy one”

“Escape.” Rapticon Sr. raised three fingers “We find the secret passage and we meet each other at Citizen District near Celes Hotel”

Moco and Yumi nodded.

“You take us to Moco’s place. From there we can gather our resources and leave on airship to Skyld.

“Hiding” said Rapticon Sr., raising a fourth finger “We will simply disappear from view, no one will find us, we’ll try to make sure that no one knows our agenda, etcetera, etcetera. You two” he looked at Yumi and Moco “will have no idea why we are doing this. You had no involvement. If asked, you will simply say that how dare we kidnapped such a kind person! You tell no one of your involvement, okay?”

This statement was met with a long pause.

“But... will we ever see you again?” asked Moco

“Contacting you might compromise us” said Harry “I think... I think it is best that we don’t try to do so”

Moco looked down miserably. Harry didn’t like to leave things this way.

“Is it too late to ask you if you can find another way?” asked Yumi

“Too late” said Rapticon Sr. “We need to go to Skyld before the Anarchy burst it into flames. This has to happen today”

“And if it fails?” said Yumi

“Failure is not an option” said Harry “We have to do this. We will”

And the table has been set.

- - -

Inside the dark dungeons of the castle, Scipio crouched beneath the figure of Severus Snape.

“Fool!” Snape slapped Scipio with his backhand “Because of your blunder, you weren’t able to maintain total arrest on the King’s mind!”

“I – I am very sorry, sir!” whimpered Scipio

“Sorry is not good enough! Don’t you see how this changes everything? The spell Rivoreld cast on the king has results that will end up His Majesty not remembering that he was hoodwinked unless the spell was interrupted. The boy has been casting this spell for months now and he needed you to help him! But you have failed!”

“Please!” wailed Scipio “Have mercy! I have tried! It’s too hard! Master Schneider has warned me that it would be hard to maintain such a spell!”

“But nonetheless, you have failed, Scipio and failure won’t be tolerated in the ranks” said Snape

“Let me redeem myself! Let me make it up to you, and my superiors!” he bent on his knees and started kissing Snape’s shoes.

“Fine,” Snape winced and kicked Scipio in the face making him yelp in pain “It has come to the attention of the boy that the king has rendered himself ‘expendable’ after your failure of maintaining him. Once out of the spell, the king will take direct action against you and knowing your lack of willpower, you will save yourself and blow the whistle”

“I’d never betray you!”

“Lies” said Snape “The only reason you are alive is because you are King’s personal adviser. Luckily, you have shown your worth to the superiors thus, they have assigned you to eliminate the king”

“You – you want me to kill King Bedeviere?”

“You heard me”

“But... but I can’t do that! They will find out!”

"You are loyal to your masters, right?" said Snape

"Y-yes"

"And you would do anything for their respect, am I correct?"

"Yes" said Scipio darkly

"Then do it. The King will be back to his normal state in a week's time, we have to take him out now. Find a way to take him. Poison, stabbing, strangling, whatever! You must make sure they don't capture you and if they do, you have to kill yourself or I will have to kill you" said Snape

"Kill me?" Scipio looked at Snape "Oho! How can you kill me without letting anyone be suspicious of you?"

"I can orchestrate that you were fighting back, simple" said Snape at once.

Scipio shook his head.

"If I do kill the king, where do I go?"

"Anywhere," said Snape "Use the King's secret passage if you must! Just leave far away from this kingdom and find a place to hide. Make sure you clear your tracks so no one will find you. If someone sees you, kill him or her no matter who it is, kill them! And if you feel everything is safe, contact us and we'll pick you up and take you to a place to stay. Understood?"

Scipio bent to his knees.

"Thank you, sir!" raised his arms to Snape "Thank you for your mercy! I promise you, I will accomplish the task at hand!"

"Then what are you waiting for?" Snape looked at Scipio like some pathetic little caterpillar

“Oh, yes” said Scipio, as he stood up and walked out of the dungeon door muttering to himself.

Snape rolled his eyes left the dungeon through another door.

- - -

Infiltration.

Harry entered the castle after inspection. He tried to shake of the weird feeling out of his system. The way that guard searched his bottom...

Did he have to search me like that?

Ignoring the moment, Harry rushed down the pavement and up the steps into the entrance hall. He looked at his wristwatch: it was already eleven fifty-seven in the morning.

Harry waited at the entrance hall. He saw many royal subjects walking back and forth looking busy. If here was a real citizen of this place, he would've enjoyed the happiness.

Where is she?

Hermione told Harry to meet her here in the entrance hall at noon. It's already twelve o-one in the afternoon.

“Harry?”

Harry turned around and saw Hermione looking very pretty in a pants and a blouse with frills around the collar and along the buttons.

“Hermione!” he said happily. It was good to see her again. “You look brilliant!”

“Thank you, you look good too” she said smiling at him

“What took you?” Harry asked

“Took me?” Hermione asked, giving him a grin “I always, always arrive a minute late from my schedule to my dates”

Harry nearly swallowed a chunk of air

“D-date?”

“We are on a date now, right?” Hermione asked

“I – I just asked to have lunch I never knew you saw it as a date” Harry said quickly

“Awww, did I embarrass you?” Hermione tilted her head “I was just joking about the ‘date’ thing. I know you just want to be friends!” she laughed.

Harry was almost amused by this Hermione from the Hermione he knew at Hogwarts. She was lively, she was very open and kind of mischievous. It was very... cute.

“Y-yeah, I just want to be friends” said Harry

“So, lunch will be ready in a few minutes, want to look around the castle?” Hermione asked

“I would love to see the gardens” Harry said, remembering the plan.

“Oh, that place scares me” Hermione said, looking sheepish

“Why?” Harry asked

“Hmmm... let’s say the other night, I was reading at the gardens and a couple of guards captured two people snooping around behind me! I wasn’t able to see them since Diana Glacius brought me inside”

Harry’s heart made a back flip. He suppressed a laugh thinking what will happen if she found out it was him.

“But at least I have a companion!” Hermione said “Maybe it’s safer since its day and everyone is busy celebrating the recent victory... your victory” she smiled

Harry didn’t know why Hermione was sucking up to him. Does she really like him? This is getting weird since he never knew Hermione would like him this way.

“Oh my gosh,” Hermione said as they walked out of the entrance hall “The moment you three left the party, my father asked me who was I with and I had to convince him to trust you since you are the hero of the war! I don’t like his bodyguards breathing down my neck all day!”

Harry remembered how the Order of The Phoenix watched him without his knowledge. It was very annoying to have them guard him every time he does something.

“But I told my father that I can take care of myself and he accepted my request to have lunch with you without bodyguards” said Hermione

“You sure showed him” Harry chuckled

“Yes, I did” Hermione nodded “I love him so much but he has to know that I am not a little girl anymore... that I can make my own mistakes, decisions and that stuff”

Hermione then sighed as they entered the beautiful gardens of the palace. At night, Harry couldn’t see anything of the gardens but it was a wide place! Far beyond, there was a hedge grove maze and lots of shaped-bushes of chocobos, moogles, bangaas, and more. The colorful flowers blended with the surroundings nicely giving the place a feel of nature in an urban area.

“There are more than fifty gardeners” Hermione said “I just love it here!”

They climbed an elevated place. Harry recognized this place since this is where he was incapacitated the other night. The fountain where Hermione sat down sprouted crystal clear water.

"I get tempted to pick up the gil that's thrown in there" Hermione admitted, looking at the coins at the bottom of the water's surface of the fountain "This is the place where I nearly got 'attacked'"

"Well, I am glad you're alright" Harry said "We – we... we wouldn't have met if it wasn't for your guards"

Hermione laughed.

"You're too sweet, Harry! Thank you!" she rubbed his arm "You are very different from the other boys I've met"

"Elias Vex?" Harry asked before he could stop himself

"Elias is a load of tiny bollocks" Hermione said "Whoops, sorry for that..."

"Don't worry," Harry said, laughing "I am amused"

"Amused? Of what?"

Harry looked at Hermione.

"Let's say I never expected the famous Hermione Grangeré to be fun to hang out with"

Harry was taken aback when he saw Hermione blushed.

"You... you really think so?" she said

"Yes" nodded Harry

"Why thank you, Harry" she said

"So what's with you and Elias?" Harry asked

"We went out for a couple of months... it just didn't work for me" Hermione said "After that he just kept on coming back to me hoping I will change my mind then he started acting like a total jerk about it"

Hermione looked up at the sky.

“But for the record, Elias is a nice, funny guy” she said

“I don’t really think so” said Harry

“You just got on his bad side” Hermione said “And his whole ‘I am a Merc’ euphoria enlarges his ego”

Harry scanned the area. The two must’ve got the two gardeners by now...

“So, Harry...” Hermione sat down on the edge of the fountain “Can you tell me anything about you?”

Harry shot Hermione a look. What will he tell her?

“Me?” Harry sat beside her

“Yes” she smiled innocently

“Um... let’s say I am not a ‘city boy’”

Hermione laughed

“Okay, let’s start with that!” she jokingly said

“And I uh... just live the normal life. I am doing well with my guild duties” Harry said

“Uncle Olaf talks a lot about you, I noticed” Hermione said “He says that your performance is unusually outstanding!”

“He did?” Harry’s spirits rose

“Yes and to be honest,” she started scratching the ground with her shoe “I sparkled a fancy into meeting this outstanding guild member of his”

"Is that why you danced with me last night?" Harry smirked at her

"Well, Uncle Olaf told me that the man he praises so highly was you, I couldn't help but try to speak with you!" she looked flushed a bit and continued "The dance was like a last minute thing since you were too shy to talk"

"Oh yeah, sorry about that" said Harry

"It's no problem" she said "But at least we survived the dance floor. You are a great dancer!"

"Heh, yeah, thanks" Harry said

Until now, Harry has never brooded on the fact why he has these abilities in the first place.

"Your friend, Ron does look at me a lot" she said, giggling "I don't mind but I wished he could talk to me"

"He's just star struck" said Harry "Famous people make him numb all the time"

"Really?" Hermione laughed "I never would've guessed"

"But I trust him with my whole life" said Harry, looking sad at the fact that she is the other person who he trusts

"I wish I had a best friend to trust with my whole life" Hermione said sadly

Harry looked at her with so much concern and care. He just wanted to hug her and make her feel that her best friend is right here.

"You never had one?" Harry said with unease

"Yes, I am bottled up with so much politics and famous people that I never had time to sit down and spend time with a normal friend... sure, the children of my father's friends are great. I can trust them but

I want a real best friend... someone who I can be with everyday and all of that, you know?"

Hermione looked at Harry who was giving her a look of utmost concern. Harry wanted to tell her how much he cares for her... but will that work? How will she respond?

"Are you... okay, Harry?" Hermione asked "You seem sad"

"Oh, sorry" said Harry "I just... I just had a realization" he forced a smile

"Of what?"

"That I feel uneasy when girls tell these things" he said all of a sudden

"Oho!" Hermione grinned "You're making fun of me?"

"No!" Harry said quickly "I appreciate you're thoughts, I really do but I am surprised you trust me knowing about this"

Hermione nodded in realization.

"Good point," she bit her lower lip "But for some reason, I know my heart can trust you – don't give me that look" she pointed to Harry's wide-eyed face "I don't know why but it just says I should, okay? I am not being short with you" she added quickly

"Do you trust anyone?" Harry asked

"Not really" Hermione said "For some reason, the people I trust in an instant are the people I can really, really trust... fortunately, I felt that feeling about you"

"Any guesses why?" Harry looked at Hermione, hoping he can get her back to normal

"Not many... but –" she then made a significant pause "You know what? I think lunch might be ready"

“Wait!” Harry said, standing up “Is there anything else I should know about you?”

Hermione thought for a moment and shook her head.

“Not that much... for now, anyway” she smiled “I like you so maybe we can do more of this in the future”

“I’ll say” Harry muttered

“Sorry?”

“Nothing, I just remembered something”

His heart leapt. He saw two gardeners enter from where he came from. He can recognize the red hair of Ron and Rapticon Sr.’s tail. He finally stalled Hermione enough to bring them here.

Kidnap.

“Remembered what?” Hermione asked

Harry looked at her again

“I – I just remembered how I used to admire your views on the political situation of this planet when I read your article” said Harry

Hermione made an unusual smile

“You really did?” she said in a very high voice

Uh... what article, Harry?

“Um, yeah” he said, unsure of himself

“You actually read it? The whole thing instead of scanning it?” she said quickly

“Yes”

“Wow, I never met a man who actually likes what I do for the best interest of this land” she said “Oh, thank you, Harry”

And she unexpectedly hugged him. The feeling of something so familiar and sensational was so relaxing that Harry wanted to go back home.

“Oh!” Hermione gasped as she stood back from Harry. She was blushing everywhere “I – I’m sorry, I didn’t know why I did that”

Is it just me or did Hermione’s old personality kicked in back there?

“Haha, don’t worry about it” Harry said “I had my share of people hugging me out of the blue”

“No, no, no” she said, rubbing her forehead “I – I just hugged you out of the context that I’ve known you before... you just seem so familiar!”

Harry’s heart made a second leap for the day. Hermione must be crawling back again!

“You really think so?” Harry asked excitedly

“Yes,” said Hermione “You remind me of someone I knew two years ago, I think”

Harry’s heart sank. He was expecting the old Hermione to say that she knew a boy from a place called Hogwarts but no, he reminded her of someone she met two years ago... probably an ex-boyfriend.

But things were more important right now. Harry looked up and saw Rapticon Sr. twirling his arm around as he and Ron walked passed them. Then with one split-second, the hands of Rapticon Sr. slapped his forehead.

The signal! It’s time to move in.

“Harry, are you disappointed about something?”

“Me? No” said Harry

“Harry,” Hermione said with a kind smile “if there is one you stink at then that might be lying”

“Lying? I – uh –” Harry sighed “Yes, I am lying”

“I thought so” said Hermione, she looked at the side “I had my share of lies. It’s not very pretty”

“I know. Sorry” said Harry

“Don’t be” Hermione said in a happy voice “If it is personal then don’t say anything. I was just wondering if you were disappointed with... er – me”

“I wouldn’t!” Harry said “You’re very nice”

“Thanks” Hermione nodded

“Hermione?” Harry said, trying to change the subject

“Yes?”

“Can you show me around the castle?” he asked

“Of course!” Hermione said, standing up “Where do you want to look?”

“Er... the trophy room” Harry said

“Sure, why not?” said Hermione “Lunch will probably be ready in fifteen or something minutes so let us kill time, shall we?”

“Lets” Harry nodded

“You lead and I’ll follow. You do know where it is, right?”

“Uh...” Harry said

Hermione giggled.

“Don’t worry, I’ll tell you how it works”

As if everything went black. Harry thought a menu interface popped in front of him showing him a set of options. It felt like a tutorial.

“You can check out your map in your inventory” said Hermione

Harry checked his pockets and saw a folded map with the technical figures along the frame.

“That map is a ‘Trans-Map’,” said Hermione “With the proper usage, you can ask the map if you want a plot of the place within a five-mile radius”

Just like the Marauder’s Map.

Harry observed the map. It was hard but could be folded four times. It wasn’t paper but very strong plastic. It was very thin and the frames were laden with buttons that are numbered from one to zero and a star symbol.

“What are the numbers for?”

“When you go to places you haven’t been to, you have to apply the area code to get the map to check your coordinates and then it returns with results” said Hermione “Every guild member has one”

“That’s great!” Harry said “Can it detect living beings?”

“No” said Hermione “But it can point out places you can mark like shops, inns, blacksmiths, etcetera. It’s an amazing gadget. I only used one once when I visited Uncle Olaf’s guild”

“My guild” said Harry

“Yes,” she said “So, it looks like you haven’t set the code of the area”

Harry realized the screen in the thin map showed nothing but a very slick interface.

“What’s the area code again?” Harry asked sheepishly

“seven-four-one-five-nine-five-three-star” Hermione said

Harry pressed the corresponding numbers and after waiting with a loading screen, a map of the area came out.

“Wow!” Harry said, looking at the very clear and solid interface of the map. It didn’t show details like floors, grass and such but only an outline of the whole area.

“We are here” Hermione pointed at the red marker on the map “If you need anything to know, there’s always the ‘Help’ button” she tapped on a button with a light bulb symbol. There is a stylus at the back,” she pulled it out and pushed it back in “it helps you navigate around the map like floor plans, or give you a different view of the map and the like”

Harry almost forgot he had to do something important! The tutorial on the Trans-Map must’ve taken his interest somewhere else.

“You know what to do?”

“Yes,” said Harry

Harry looked at the map and using the stylus, he pointed at the interface where a set of numbers were shown. This must be the floors. He fiddled around and saw that the trophy room was at the seventh floor.

“Seventh floor” said Harry, folding the thin map and placing it in his pocket

“Let’s go!” Hermione skipped passed Harry

The two walked out of the gardens. Harry looked behind him and saw the Rapticon Sr. and Ron, who were dressed in gardener suits

following behind. Rapticon Sr. waved at Harry signaling him to go with Hermione.

Harry took the lead while Hermione followed behind him. They followed up the staircase passing by royal subjects who ignored them much to Harry's relief.

After a few steps, Harry and Hermione reached the seventh floor. Harry took a double step back and checked if Ron and Rapticon Sr. were there. Luckily, he saw Rapticon Sr. and Ron taking the sixth flight of stairs up. Rapticon Sr.'s unmistakable claws holding the railings told Harry that.

"Harry!" Hermione called

Harry followed Hermione. The castle was huge. It reminded him of Hogwarts. The place was just so familiar... he looked at the still portraits. Oh how happy he would be if he saw a moving portrait right now. The hallway was different from the ones below. The carpet was now dressed in royal purple with flagged stones as walls and a wooden frame around the lower parts of the wall. This must be where the throne is stationed.

"Where does that lead us?" Harry asked, pointing down a hallway Hermione didn't turn to

"The throne room" said Hermione "It's empty except for His Majesty and Scipio, his adviser... these days, the king doesn't want guards around anymore so the guards guard the possible entrance to this floor"

"I see" said Harry, he followed Hermione down the new corridor she went to "How long have you visited this castle?"

"Since I was – er – three? I think" Hermione said, stopping on her tracks "I haven't been here in ages!"

Harry remembered what the map showed him. The trophy room was just right at the end of this hallway.

"It's down here" said Harry

The two walked down the corridor. Harry examined the hallways formal decorations. Blue and gold drapes wreathed almost everything: the windows, the upper corners of the walls, hallway entrances and door frames.

"Blue and gold is considered the kingdom's national color" said Hermione, catching Harry's gaze

"Nice," said Harry, remembering Ravenclaw.

"Right over here!" Hermione said as they reached a threshold "Here you go, Harry! The trophy room!"

Harry looked inside and his jaw dropped. The place was huge. Almost hundreds of glass shelves filled with statuettes, plaques, trophies and diplomas were lined up along the walls. Tables and chairs occupied the center and a chandelier hung above all of them.

"Wow..." said Harry

"Let me show you something" said Hermione, she grabbed him by the arm

Hermione dragged Harry to a shelf that had the words 'Military' on it. Harry saw in amazement his name on a plaque. Rapticon Sr.'s and Ron's trophies were there too.

"They just made it this morning" said Hermione "My father told me the soldiers who served in Operation: Ibarra were to receive their plaques today at the afternoon. The palace will have their own copy of your plaque for record purposes"

Harry sighed at his plaque. He has achieved so much for the past week and now he is throwing all of that away by doing this. Is it too late to abort? Harry sat on the edge of the table behind him feeling an empty pit in his stomach forming.

"Are you okay, Harry?" Hermione looked at him

“Yes,” said Harry and looked at her “Hermione? Can I ask you something?”

“Sure” said Hermione sitting beside him

“Can I trust you?”

“What?” Hermione asked, looking perplexed

“Can I trust you with something I am about to tell?” Harry said it with more clear details.

“Well,” Hermione said looking unsure “I can’t lie that I can’t keep a secret... but are you sure? We just met, after all”

“Yes but I am having the same feeling you are” said Harry “The whole ‘You-feel-familiar’ thing”

“Really?” Hermione looked at Harry in interest

“Yeah... for some reason, I can’t help but trust you” said Harry, looking away from her “Just don’t be too conclusive on what I am about to tell you, though”

“Of course, why would I be conclusive?” Hermione smirked

“You’re not” said Harry “You’re sweet, kind and understanding –“

“Just shut up, Harry” said Hermione, smiling “Shut up. You had me at ‘hello’”

“Wha –?” Harry said, feeling a bit affronted but confused

This time, Hermione didn’t answer but the gruff, American voice of Rapticon Sr.

“Accula loves watching Academy award winning films and Hermione just said a line from a film that one such an award, it’s a reference”

“Rapticon Sr.?” Hermione said in a surprised tone “This is a surprised! What are you doing here?”

“You should be asking Ronald too” Rapticon Sr. dragged Ron into the room

“Hello, Hermione” said Ron, sheepishly. Harry could tell Ron was reluctant to do this.

“What’s going on Harry?” Hermione looked at Harry “Do they want to see their plaques too?”

“We got plaques?” Ron looked around the trophy room “Where?”

Harry and Hermione pointed at the shelf in front of them. Ron ran towards it excitedly and started examining the shelf.

“Wow! This is as big as my Special Services trophy back at Hogwarts!” Ron said

Harry saw Rapticon Sr. closed the door of the trophy room. What will they do to take Hermione?

“Um... Rapticon Sr.” Hermione said, standing up “That door needs to be open”

“Not now it isn’t” Rapticon Sr. interjected “Hermione, is it okay if I ask you to sit down?”

“What in blazes?” Hermione looked at Rapticon Sr. “Harry?”

Harry didn’t have the heart to reply. He just looked at Hermione apologetically.

“Harry won’t spill?” said Rapticon Sr. “Fine. Ms. Granger –“

“Grangeré” Hermione corrected

“Yes, I know” said Rapticon Sr. “Now please, we need you to stay calm and sit down”

Hermione did nothing. She looked at Harry and Ron and sat down slowly.

“What is this about?” Hermione asked “You three are war heroes of the same battle yesterday so this must be about national security, right? Are you telling me something?”

“Kinda and yes, respectively.” said Rapticon Sr. “You see, Hermione. Our meeting last night was set up by fate. We were meant to find you”

“Find me?” Hermione looked at Rapticon Sr.

“It’s a matter of what is real and what is not” Rapticon Sr. said “But let’s cut it to the chase, for the past eleven-hours, we have orchestrated a plan to extract you from the castle.”

A long and uncomfortable pause took over the whole room. Hermione looked at Harry, Ron and then Rapticon Sr. She started to laugh.

“Is this some kind of joke? Are you telling me you are going to kidnap me?”

“Kidnap is a strong word. We would like to call it a go and get mission, Ms. Granger” said Rapticon Sr., using Hermione’s real last name again

“Grangeré” Hermione corrected again but with a tone of impatience

“Anyway,” Rapticon Sr. continued without taking in the correction into consideration “We have hoped that we can access ourselves to you so we can ask for your consent –“

“Definitely not” said Hermione at once “Under what pretenses are you planning? Do you have an agenda that might threaten this kingdom?”

“No” said Rapticon Sr. “We are not interested in what happens to this land. What we – Ron, Harry and I – want is to bring you home with us”

Hermione looked at Harry in confusion.

“Harry, what is this about?”

Harry sighed. He shook his head and stood up.

“Hermione... I wish I can tell you now –“

“Why not?” Hermione said, her voice rising “Is this what you were about tell me awhile ago? That you are going to take me somewhere with my consent?”

“Let me finish!” Harry said “We will explain everything later but right now, we need you to trust us”

Hermione looked at Harry, helplessly.

“Look, you thought that you could trust me despite that we just met” Harry continued “Can you do that for me now?”

Hermione opened her mouth but closed it. She was at loss of words. Harry knew she had her hands tied at the moment. He could feel she couldn't trust him under these circumstances.

“Please?” Harry asked

Hermione looked at Harry.

“Harry,” said Hermione softly “Just tell me what do you want”

“We want you, Hermione” said Harry

“Why?” Hermione asked “What importance do I hold to you? And why do you still have to ask my permission?”

“This is not working” said Rapticon Sr. “I told you that a calm and formal approach is a bad idea”

“What other options do you have in plan?” Hermione asked, looking worried

“You don’t want to know” said Rapticon Sr. “Just cooperate with us, we’ll make sure you’re safe and we’ll explain on the way. We need to get out of this place”

“If I said ‘yes’, would you leave the palace in an honest fashion?” Hermione asked

“Your father should never know” said Rapticon Sr.

“Why shouldn’t he!” Hermione said

“Hermione, calm down!” Ron said “We need you to come with us”

“Why!” Hermione looked at Ron and Harry “Please, at least tell me! I don’t want to get hurt!”

“We won’t hurt you unless you don’t cooperate!” Rapticon Sr. pointed out “You have my word, we are going to tell you everything you need to know which concerns your recent dreams of a school that resides in a damn castle!”

Hermione froze.

“How did you know about my dreams?”

“Olaf told us last night” said Rapticon Sr. “He said it’s been wandering in your mind for weeks”

“I am still not convinced that I have to trust you” said Hermione firmly

“Fine,” said Rapticon Sr. shrugging “Either way, we will take you out of this palace and get out of this place”

“And how are you doing that?” Hermione asked “This place is heavily guarded”

“The throne room isn’t” said Rapticon Sr. “We want you to go inside and search the place where the King’s secret passage is”

“I can’t do that!” said Hermione “Unless I know what you are going to do with me or why you want me, I will cooperate!”

“Harry, tell her a partial of what’s going on” said Rapticon Sr.

Harry took a deep breath and looked at Hermione.

“Okay... er – we are going to take you to Skyld. A friend of Rapticon Sr. is there, his name is Accula”

“The archmage, I know” said Hermione “What do you want from him?”

“We need him to help us get out of here”

“Where? The palace?”

“No” said Harry, he paused and finally “Atrynömunal”

Hermione looked at Harry blankly.

“I don’t get it” she said

“Hermione, it’s hard to explain –“

“He means that this whole place is a fictional world and you are a real person living inside it” said Ron

“What?” Hermione spat

“Hermione.” Harry said “Just listen to us, please”

“You three must be crazy! Atrynömunal is not a fictional place! We are living in it right now!”

“We are aware of that” said Harry “But let’s say you are reading a book about animals and then one time, you get sucked into the book

and then poof! You are living among the animals that are inside the book”

“Are you telling me we are in a book?” Hermione asked giving Harry an unsure look

“YES! BINGO!” Rapticon Sr. said “Everything you see here, feel, smell, eat, kick, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera are just fictional plots made by my friend Accula! The reason why it feels real is because the magic Accula used to make this world is strong magic that I don’t know crap about! There are five ‘real’ beings in this world. You, me, Harry, Ron and Accula. Accula knows our way out and we need to find him. You are here and since you are Harry and Ron’s best friend, we need you to come with us to find Accula so we can get out, got it?”

This speech made Hermione dumbstruck.

“You expect me to believe that!” she said “What kind of author would write that story!”

“One who has a computer and an internet connection” said Rapticon Sr. “Now give me an answer, will you cooperate with us or not?”

Hermione looked at Harry. Harry gave her a pleading look to say “Yes”.

“What’s in it for you?” Hermione asked

“I am not a terrorist, Hermione” said Rapticon Sr. “We need to find a way out of here, we are taking along with you. We are aware that you won’t come with us even with a little convincing but we need to take you”

“And what makes you think I will accept?” Hermione said

“Ron has planted fire-starters the palace walls and entrance hall where an approximate six or seven hundred body count will take place if the fire-starters would be ignited” said Rapticon Sr.

“You wouldn’t” said Hermione

“Just cooperate, please” said Rapticon Sr. “All we need is that you go to the throne room and find the secret passage for us”

“Why me?”

“Because Scipio or the King wouldn’t mind your face in that place” said Rapticon Sr.

“Then if I find it, how can you enter the passageway?”

“The King is like a potato these days, our problem is Scipio”

“You want to incapacitate him, right?” Hermione asked

“Yes” said Rapticon Sr. “When you leave, call his attention and either of us will knock him out. Afterwards, we escape”

Hermione glared at Rapticon Sr.

“If my father hears of this”

“No one will ever know of your disappearance until we are airborne. Yes, we have scheduled a flight out of here” said Rapticon Sr.

Hermione then shot a look at Harry.

“You knew about this?” she spat

“Yes” said Harry “I – I’m just trying to help you –“

“Help me!” Hermione stood up “I am happy with what I have here and you are taking it all away from me! Under what reason? A cock-and-bull story, that’s what!”

“Just do what you need to do” said Rapticon Sr. “We are sorry if we don’t have any proof of our case but just trust us”

Hermione looked at Rapticon Sr. then to Ron and then to Harry.

“Fine,” she said “At least now, I will see how your word is worth”

“Excellent” muttered Rapticon Sr.

“I am doing this for the lives you are threatening” said Hermione

“We are not threatening anyone” said Ron “We just need you to at least believe us. Blimey Hermione, don’t you remember who we are? Your best friends?”

Hermione’s frowned disappeared. Harry knew she had familiarity with him. Did she just have some familiarity with Ron?

“Well?” Ron asked

Hermione didn’t answer. She just turned to Rapticon Sr.

“Just walk up to the throne room and locate the secret passageway” said Rapticon Sr.

“Don’t worry, I know where it is” said Hermione “I need to refresh my memory on where exactly. The architecture of the Majestic Hall is repetitive”

“Understood” said Rapticon Sr. “We will be behind you if something happens”

“Like what?” Hermione looked at Rapticon Sr. quizzically

“I don’t trust Scipio” said Rapticon Sr. “During the party, Olaf introduced me to him and the only thing he’s been staring at was you the whole time”

“He was?” Hermione’s eyes widened

“And the last thing I want is someone jeopardizing your safety” said Rapticon Sr. “Be careful”

Hermione nodded. Harry deducted Hermione must've took note of Rapticon Sr.'s concern.

"Let's do this" said Hermione

"Good" Rapticon Sr. said

The four left the trophy room. Hermione lead the way up the corridor and down the other which lead to the Throne Room or the Majestic Hall.

"We will wait here" said Rapticon Sr., hiding behind another corridor with Ron and Harry "Look, the top priority is your safety, okay? So if there's something wrong, scream"

"I thought you want to get out of here?" Hermione asked, suspicious of Rapticon Sr.'s sudden change of persona

"Let's assume that I realize one of us cares a lot about you" he stared at Harry and Ron

Hermione didn't answer. She just nodded and continued down the hall.

"What do you have against, Scipio?" Ron asked

"Apart from being a pedophilic numb nut? Nothing" said Rapticon Sr.

Hermione walked down the corridor as she was told. She wished she could just run and report the guards. But what if Rapticon Sr. was right? What if she was living in a fictional word? It's hard to believe but he seems to know something about her dreams of the castle school... or is he just fooling her into doing things?

Hermione was about to enter the tall double doors when she saw Scipio exit the Majestic Hall. She stopped on her tracks as she saw him running towards were with quick pace. He seemed too occupied with something to notice her that he stopped before he could bump into Hermione.

“Scipio?” Hermione said, staring into his sweating forehead

“Oh, Miss Grangeré! H-h-how do you d-do?” he said with a shaky laugh

“I was just on my way to Majestic Hall to meet His Majesty about some issues” said Hermione slowly, observing Scipio

“Why, why, why?” he said with a stutter. Hermione noticed he was shivering “His Majesty is resting”

“Is that blood?” Hermione covered her mouth, pointing to Scipio’s robes

“Oh th-this?” he said with a nervous chuckle “I – I kind of spilled my red wine, very clumsy of me, really”

“You don’t smell of red wine” said Hermione, sniffing the air “Is there something you are hiding, Scipio?”

Meanwhile, Rapticon Sr. watched the scene unfolding before him. Harry peeked from below Rapticon Sr.

“I don’t like this at all” said Harry

“Me too” said Ron

“Something’s wrong” said Rapticon Sr. “Scipio is hiding something”

Harry saw Scipio giving Hermione a piercing stare... it looked haunting. Hermione then took a step forward but Scipio side-stepped in front of her shaking his head.

“What is going on?” Hermione’s voice said loudly

“N-n-nothing!” he said “The King needs his rest! He can’t be d-d-disturbed!”

“Then why can’t I check it out?” Hermione asked sternly “There’s nothing to hide, right?”

Scipio froze and looked to his left and right.

“He’s hiding something, I’m going in” said Rapticon Sr. “I think we just ran into something big here”

“Wait!” Harry said “What if he tries to hurt Hermione on your approach?”

“He won’t” said Rapticon Sr.

Harry looked back at Hermione but saw a Scipio grabbed Hermione from her neck, gagged her and carried her off towards the throne room. Something is definitely wrong.

“Dammit!” Rapticon Sr. said as he jumped out of his hiding place “Scipio!”

“Don’t move!” yelled Scipio, drawing out a long bloody dagger from its sheath and placing the blade across Hermione’s neck “Or the girl gets it!”

“NO!” Harry and Ron yelled

“Don’t play games with me, Scipio” Rapticon Sr. drew out his hammer from his coat

“Don’t underestimate me, Dimitri” said Scipio, taking a step backwards towards the door of the throne room “You don’t want this girl to die, do you?”

“No I don’t but killing her won’t help you. The moment you slit her throat, we will catch you and then you know what we will do next? We will report her father and he will eat you alive. Hermione’s soul can rest in peace” said Rapticon Sr.

Harry saw the words of Rapticon Sr. affected Scipio. His eyes were wide as ever and he was shaking from head to toe.

“You’re shaking” said Rapticon Sr. “Are you frightened?”

“DON’T TELL ME WHAT I AM FEELING!” he yelled

Then in an instant, he withdrew his dagger and quickly dragged Hermione into the throne room.

“Quick!” Harry said

The three ran towards the double doors and pushed it open. A horrific site met their eyes.

Sitting on his throne, King Bedeviere head was lying backwards showing a deep cut across his throat. His eyes showed that of horror and fear.

“Oh my Merlin” Ron said in a dead whisper “The King is...”

“Dead” said Harry in shock

“Is that what you were hiding?” Rapticon Sr. glared at Scipio who had Hermione within his grasp.

“Hahahaha, you four are very curious ones, eh?” he started making hysterical laughs

“I – I can’t believe you killed him!” Hermione screamed, as she tried to struggle

“No, no, no, no” said the drawling voice of Scipio as he drew out his dagger again, threatening Hermione once more

“Don’t you dare touch her!” Harry yelled

“Too bad, I just did” said Scipio feeling more confident now “She’s quite a catch, don’t you say”

Harry looked in hatred as he saw her sniff her neck.

“I have always fancied the daughter of Sir Jacques” said Scipio

“You don’t say?” said Rapticon Sr. in sarcasm “If you try something funny, Scipio –“

“I have the dagger and you have a hammer” said Scipio, giving them a mocking look “Any funny business from the three of you and I will be forced to kill her!”

Then he looked at Hermione with a very drawing look.

“But then again, it would be a pity to kill such an... angel” he licked his lips

A beast within Harry roared like a fierce lion as Scipio started fondling Hermione’s bottom. Hermione started whimpering trying to struggle from Scipio’s dagger and exploring hand.

“STOP IT! STOP IT!” Harry yelled

“Oh, you hate it, don’t you?” Scipio mocked him “Wished that you were in my shoes right now?”

“Shut up!” Ron said “Pretty soon, the guards will come up here and catch you!”

“And what next? Arrest me? No, no, no, no” said Scipio, now with utmost confidence “What I’ve done is just a small piece of what’s coming next!”

He then started to sniff Hermione’s hair... Harry saw Rapticon Sr. wince with his fist shaking. Harry’s hear nearly escaped his insides as he saw Scipio attempting to touch Hermione’s chest...

“If you know what’s best for you, Scipio” said Rapticon Sr., interrupting “I suggest you know who you’re up against”

Then Scipio stopped his actions and gave Rapticon Sr. a questioning look. Harry noticed his hold on the dagger on Hermione’s neck lowering.

“Then who would that might be?”

“This” said Rapticon Sr. “Hermione!”

Harry saw Hermione push the arm of Scipio away from her and ducked as Rapticon Sr. threw a throwing knife to Scipio’s shoulder. Scipio yelled in pain as Hermione crawled to Harry.

“Hermione, are you alright?”

“Y-y-yes...” said Hermione, looking shaken “I can’t believe he touched me...” she was already breaking in tears

“You’re fine” said Harry “Don’t worry”

Then with all the feelings in him, he opened his arms and hugged Hermione in a tight embrace. She hugged him back, shaking.

Scipio fell to his knees as he breathed deeply. He saw as his blood oozed out of his shoulder. Rapticon Sr. walked towards Scipio and stepped on him giving him a glare.

“I wouldn’t make a move if I were you” said Ron, walking towards Scipio and summoning his lance from thin air

Rapticon Sr. pulled the dagger from Scipio’s shoulder giving him a yelp of pain.

“You... will... pay!” said Scipio “You have no idea who I am working for!”

“Let me guess, the Natsi Anarchy?” Rapticon Sr. asked in a mocking voice “Make me laugh”

Scipio, wincing in the pain, looked indifferent. Rapticon Sr. looked at Scipio suspiciously.

“Is that a look of a liar?” Rapticon Sr. said

Harry and Hermione broke from their hug and looked on as Rapticon Sr. walked towards Scipio. He stepped on Scipio's wound making him cry in pain.

"Are you hiding something from us?" he asked

Scipio started making wails which echoed the Majestic Hall.

"Don't make me step harder" said Rapticon Sr. "Why did you kill King Bedeviere?"

Scipio said nothing but only continued his wailing.

"The pain will only stop unless you tell me; WHY DID YOU KILL THE KING!" Rapticon Sr. yelled

Scipio then coughed and started speaking.

"I – I was ordered!" he said weakly

"By who?" Rapticon Sr.

"Someone in the palace –"

"WHO ARE YOU WORKING FOR?" Rapticon Sr. yelled, stepping on the wound of Scipio with full force.

"AAAHHHH!" yelled Scipio

"STOP IT!" Hermione cried "PLEASE!"

Rapticon Sr. released his foot and looked at Hermione who was teary eyed in Harry's arms. He sighed in relief just seeing that image of Hermione in the care of her best friend... it made Rapticon Sr. happy.

"When are you going to kill me?" asked Scipio helplessly

"Who said we are going to kill you?" Rapticon Sr. asked "Obviously, something is going on here and I don't like it. You killed the king so

that makes your agenda somewhat greater than any of us here in this room”

“Yes” said Scipio weakly

“Then tell me, who ordered you to kill the King?”

Scipio then winced and said

“S – S – S”

“Who!”

“Severus Snape!”

The name echoed around the halls. There was pure silence.

“Snape?” Harry, Rapticon Sr. and Ron said in unison

“Are you referring to Sir Severus Snape of the Royal Council?”
Hermione said in shock

“Y-yes” said Scipio breathing heavily “He ordered me to kill the king and –” he coughed “Anyone who gets in my way”

“Mainly, us” said Rapticon Sr. nodding

“And why did you kill the king?” Hermione asked “WHY!”

“Because he needed to do so” said a familiar voice from behind them

Harry, Ron, Rapticon Sr. and Hermione turned around to see the familiar face of Severus Snape glaring at them. Harry saw that F.F.O. hasn’t change Snape’s features but his clothes were new. He wore a black mage robe and a cape and had a belt around his waste equipped with pouches and two potions.

“Severus Snape?” Rapticon Sr. said in bewilderment

“Sir Severus Snape” said Snape

Harry couldn't help it. The fact that Snape is responsible of the death of a king is almost ironic! He almost forgot that people the readers knew in real life might make appearances in this world and Snape was one of them...

"I don't believe this..." said Hermione "You are part of the Council! A respected member!"

"Miss Grangeré, if you know what is best for you then I suggest you be quiet" said Snape

"What in Merlin's name are you doing here?" Ron spat

"Ron," said Rapticon Sr., taking a step forward to Ron "That's not Snape, remember that"

"I am here" said Snape walking towards them with his hands behind his back "because I have found something quite interesting within my crystals"

"Crystals?" Harry looked at Hermione

"Sir Severus Snape is a Crystal Master. Crystals are elements that hold strong magic" said Hermione quietly

"You see," said Snape, stopping on his tracks and turning to Harry and company "my superiors are asking me to do a task of great importance! A task that, if accomplish, will bring back the planet glory days back to speed"

"What are you planning to do!" Hermione yelled all of a sudden "You killed King Bedeviere!"

"He had to go, he was a nuisance in the plan" said Snape enigmatically, surveying the king's dead body on the throne "Pity, he was a humble but hobble man"

"You are no better" said Hermione, standing up

“Tsk, tsk, tsk” said Snape, giving his famous sneer to Hermione
“Hermione –“

“That’s Miss Grangeré” Hermione seethed

“Miss Grangeré” said Snape, nodding “A few hours ago, I have checked the crystals... and one of them showed me something amusing which clarifies my hypotheses in the past months”

Harry turned to Hermione. She looked shaken...

“You are aware that I experiment with crystals” Snape pressed on
“and crystals can do anything you see fit. It can give you abilities, produce remedies for sickness, store magic, and the like”

Snape took a step forward towards Hermione but didn’t walk any further.

“But...” he grinned “You also know that it can store painful memories”

Harry heard Hermione gulp. What was she hiding?

“What’s going on?” Harry looked at Hermione and Snape

“You’ll see” said Snape, he reached for his robe pocket and took out a large crystal cube attached to a silver chain. It looked really old.

“This is a memoir” Snape raised it so everyone could see “of a moment in Miss Grangeré’s life”

“Please... Sir Severus” Hermione said in a pleading tone

“Ah,” he looked at her with malice “Is that the sound of a weeping child asking for something?”

Harry saw Hermione’s face. She looked horrorstruck and teary eyed. He never saw her like this before.

“I thought so” said Snape “I am guessing that you know what’s in this, correct?”

“How did you get that?” Hermione said quickly

“A contact sent it to me,” said Snape “He was snooping around your room at your estate”

Hermione didn't say a thing. She just looked at Snape with a piercing look. Harry didn't know what he wanted... to stop Snape from revealing whatever he is about to reveal or to let him go on with it.

“Anyway,” Snape continued “I checked the contents and I can see that the one I have been looking for is just right under my very nose”

This time, Hermione shouted.

“DON'T YOU DARE THREATEN ME!”

“Threaten you?” Snape laughed “How in the Sentinels' name am I threatening you?”

“You are threatening me of my personal life, that's what!” she exclaimed “Look, maybe we can work this out - !”

“Work this out?” Snape said “Miss Grangeré, you seem to miss the point here! What I want is you”

“And why is that?” Harry said, stepping into the fray. He can't take this anymore.

“And you are?”

“Harry Potter” said Harry. It felt weird introducing himself to a man he loathed so much for years “I am a friend of Hermione”

“Miss Grangeré has history of being with a lot of boys” mocked Snape “I doubt she told you?”

“Told me what?” Harry asked looking at Hermione

"I see, just like everyone, she never tells" said Snape "Isn't that right, Hermione?"

Hermione glared at Snape.

"Even if you reveal it to them, I will never, ever accept! My mother died because of me!" she yelled with tears falling down from her eyes

"Because of what?" Ron said looking confused beyond reason

Snape then raised his voice to a near shout.

"Because the girl you are looking at right now is hiding a secret that has been haunting her for the past decade!"

"PLEASE!" Hermione cried

Snape ignored her and continued

"She was bright!" Snape said, now sounding direct and strict pointing at her while he paced the floor "She was smart enough to hide it from the millions! How could I be so blind whenever I visited the estate that you were a strange little girl?"

"But yes, you were strange but special. I never brooded on it but I always wondered until my masters told me about your kind being alive in the palace!"

"Your kind?" Rapticon Sr. gave Hermione a quizzical look

"But ever since my courier gave me this crystal," Snape cradled the crystal in his hands "It has answered every damn question that I've been asking for! I never knew that the General's daughter was the one I am looking for. Under my very nose, like I said"

Then Snape's eyes looked at the crystal with longing.

"Miss Grangeré's mother didn't die because of her political connections but because of a hidden secret she's been hiding for decades"

Then Hermione let out a lunge towards Snape but Rapticon Sr. was able to grab her in time before she could do any damage.

“Let me go!”

“Snape might hurt you!” Rapticon Sr. said restraining her

“Physically and emotionally to be precise” said Snape “But this time, I will do this emotionally”

Then Snape lifted the crystal as it levitated at midair. The crystal started giving out a faint blue glow...

The whole room magically turned dim as the crystal flashed a projected light above the ceiling. Harry looked in awe as flashes of images emitted everywhere.

A crying girl, a woman screaming as if she was in excruciating pain, demonic-looking figures, the crying girl, the screaming woman, a dragon and more screaming... crying...

Then a voice echoed the Majestic Hall in full volume.

“Mother” said the young little girl, as the disturbing images continued flashing

Harry couldn’t see a scene but he could hear it clearly

“Honey, honey” said a voice of an obvious older woman “What did I tell you? You keep quiet!”

Then the sound of loud banging could be heard among the flashing images.

“Oh no... quick, Hermione! I don’t want to give you up”

Harry heard running footsteps and lots of stuff falling. It felt like a struggle.

“Mother,” the voice of the little girl whimpered “Are we going to be alright?”

“Yes, darling” said the voice of the mother “We are going to be alright... just close your eyes and – “

BASH!

Harry nearly jumped as he heard the more running footsteps and lots of grazing. He wished the crystal produced a clear view of the situation.

“You stay here, darling” said the mother as sounds of moving objects could be heard “Promise mommy that you’ll never move, okay?”

“Where are you going?” the little girl said giving out a sniff

“I am going to get help just – “

BSH!

Then Harry heard the sound of lots of footsteps entering. This told him that new arrivals have breached their hiding place... wherever it is.

“What are you hiding?” said a deep voice

“No, no, no... please...” Hermione said

Harry saw Hermione covering her ears making silent sobs.

“Nothing” said the defiant voice of the mother “What is it that you want?”

“Tell us where the girl is” said another voice but this time, this voice had a Cockney accent

“What girl?”

The sound of a slap could be heard as the mother's voice gasped. Laughs that made the hair on the back of Harry's head stand up. He then heard sounds of punching, kicking and beating, the cries of the little girl could be heard.

"She probably knows nothing about the Summoner" said a drawling voice

"Expendable." said one of them "The girl is not here, then"

"Right, let's get rid of her"

Sounds of dragging, a door closing shut, objects being moved and tiny footsteps could be heard. The breathing of the little girl became heavy as the sound of distant woman's scream and laughing echoed the hall.

Then with a slight pause, Harry nearly jumped as a high-pitched scream and wave of flames met his ears. The cries of pain, agony and suffering echoed the halls. It was haunting.

"MOMMY!" yelled the little girl

"That's enough!" Rapticon Sr. shouted

Snape grabbed the crystal making the place normally lit again.

"Yes, I think we have seen enough" said Snape, eyeing at Hermione who was now crying "And if you are wondering then I will answer: Yes. What you see here in this memory is proof that Hermione Grangeré is in fact one of the few people in this world that can summon the almighty Sentinels of this planet!"

"Hermione?" Harry gasped "A S-Summoner!"

"You heard me" drawled Snape "Hermione Jane Grangeré, daughter of General Jacques Wilton Grangeré is in fact the last known living Summoner in this land! There have been whispers of a Summoner within the palace ranks and who would've thought that it was her?"

“But I wonder...” Snape rubbed his chin thoughtfully “Why does she resent her gift?”

Hermione stopped her crying. She looked up at Snape with her bloodshot eyes and said

“I resent everything of who I am...” she said, her voice shaking with anger “My mother died because she knew what I can do. She loved me for who I was and the people who looked for me tried to kill me but my mother got killed instead!”

She stood up and looked at Snape with daggers.

“I want no involvement with anything that implicates me as a Summoner” said Hermione, her voice very steady “I hate it and I don’t want it. When the people chased me down were arrested and killed by the kingdom, I was able to live again. I began to forget on who I was and I promised that if it came crawling back to me, I will do anything to get away from it”

Harry stared at Hermione. As much as F.F.O. was fictional, Hermione’s backstory is such a deep and painful one. He empathize her feelings, remembering what it was like when he heard the prophecy at Dumbledore’s office back at his fifth year.

“And if you try to force me to use my damn powers,” Hermione’s voice was rising as she breathed deeper “Then you have to –“

“Get through me” said Harry, stepping in front of Hermione drawing his sword out of thin air

“Harry?” Hermione said in surprise

“And me” said Ron, drawing his lance

“Three heads are more than one” said Rapticon Sr. jokingly as he stood next to Ron and Harry with his hammer at ready

Snape looked at the three of them. He shook his head.

“You don’t know who you are toying with, Mister Potter” said Snape
“You are forgetting that I am one of most prominent black mages in the kingdom. Why else would they appoint me Council member?”

“I don’t care who you are” said Harry angrily “We won’t let you take Hermione”

“Then so be it” said Snape “But I will do anything to ensure that the plans of my superiors are carried out. And I won’t be reluctant to take out the ones who stay in my way!”

Harry, Ron and Rapticon Sr. jumped to battle positions as Snape raised his arms to air. The fire that emitted from his hands grew the size of Quaffles.

“Hermione, get out of here!” Ron called to Hermione

“No!” Hermione said, walking towards the side of Harry “He killed a dear friend of mine, I can’t just walk away”

“Can you fight?” Rapticon Sr. asked

Cue to this, Hermione drew out a short rod which she held by the middle. It looked metallic and didn’t look like anything for combat.

“Is that a - ?”

“Just watch” said Hermione

Hermione pressed something on the handle making the rod elongate on its two sides making it a long rod. Hermione held it by the center and went to battle stance.

“I know my own magic. My father wouldn’t let me live the world without knowing how to defend myself, would he?”

“Be careful” said Harry

“Let’s get this over with!” yelled Snape

Snape threw the balls of flames towards Harry hitting him square on the chest. Harry flew backwards to the ground feeling the hot pain rising.

“Harry!” Hermione ran to him “Are you okay?”

“I am fine” said Harry “Us warriors are trained to hold our resistance to magic” he added weakly

Harry stood up and went to battle stance. Hermione followed suit.

“Be careful, he knows the next level of black magic” said Hermione

“We will” Rapticon Sr. said “It’s over!”

The raptor sprinted towards the black mage and snapped a hammer blow on the black mage. Snape took the damage as Rapticon Sr. jumped back to battle position.

“Your mortal weapons are nothing against my magic” said Snape confidently

“Harry! Ron!” Rapticon Sr. called the two

Harry and Ron ran to Snape and attacked him but Snape was too quick. He took a step backwards and lunge a scatter shot of icicles towards them barely hitting Ron.

“Ah!” Ron winced as he dropped back

“Ron” Harry said

“Harry watch out!” Ron said pointing behind Harry

Harry looked back and saw Snape’s palms electrifying.

Thundara?

Harry dodge rolled the bolt of lighting like what he did with the Behemoth back at Ibarra.

“Too fast!” said Rapticon Sr. running to Snape.

Rapticon Sr. raised his hammer and nearly slammed Snape down the floor but Snape was too quick. F.F.O. must’ve made Snape a faster fighter.

“Ron,” Hermione went to Ron “Here, this will help”

Ron looked up as Hermione held her hands in a praying position and in an instant; she made a white glow around him making him feel a lot better.

“Thanks” Ron said, standing up “Cure?”

“Not really” said Hermione, she looked behind Ron “LOOK OUT!”

Ron saw Snape hurl dark orbs towards them and with the quick Dragoon instincts, Ron grabbed Hermione and put him and her from harms way.

“That was close” said Ron “Harry!”

“I am here!” Harry jumped to Snape and started slashing away but Snape’s nimbleness got the better of Harry.

“Argh, he’s too fast!” Harry groaned as he went back down the ground

“Of course, Potter” said Snape, building a fireball with his hand “I am the best of the best”

“No!” Rapticon Sr., Ron and Harry yelled as the three jumped at the same time and aimed their attacks towards Snape.

BAM!

In a successful attempt, the sword, lance and hammer took damaged blows to Snape making him yelp him pain as he fell backwards. The expected damage from a sword wasn’t visible on Snape’s body.

Harry thought Snape had the same weapon resistance training as he had.

“Got more up your sleeve, Snape?” Rapticon Sr. sneered

“AH!” Snape yelled as he stood up in quick fashion “I can’t let you stop me from doing my mission. FLARE!”

Hermione screamed as a ball of purple, red, yellow and orange started forming in the center of the room. The ball began to grow larger as fire started emitting in the growing orb. Harry, Ron and Rapticon Sr. froze at the sight and then...

- - -

BOOM!

Yumi jumped from her nap. She got out of the cart’s mantle and saw Moco at the end of the alley, looking up.

“What’s going on, Moco?” asked Yumi in a shaken voice

“Oh no,” said Moco “Oh no, oh no, oh no”

Yumi jumped out of the cart and ran to Moco’s position.

The sight made her jaw drop. Up at the castle, smoke began to build up from the explosion that was made on the King’s Majestic Hall. The wide window that was known throughout the capital was nowhere to be found.

“Oh my gosh, they didn’t...” said Yumi “What are the chances that the king was in there?”

“I don’t think he was... Harry wouldn’t do anything that rash, kupo” Moco said “But I hope they are alright”

Yumi surveyed the crowd. Everyone was looking and pointing at the smoke. People started talking in panicked voices about some rebellion or a possible assassination attempt on the King.

“Moco, there’s something wrong” said Yumi “We have to go in”

“NO!” said Moco “We have to wait for them, kupo! It might jeopardize everything, kupo!”

“But Harry is in there!” Yumi said “And Rapticon Sr. and Ron and who knows, Hermione Grangeré!”

“I can’t say I know what’s going on there, kupo” said Moco “But there is nothing we can do! We are far away from the entrance!”

Yumi looked at the palace hopelessly. She wished she could do something...

“Yumi, listen to me, kupo!” said Moco, flying to Yumi’s face and holding her cheeks with his two hands “Harry will be okay! I know you like him but just wait for results! We can’t do anything right now but wait for them to come out, kupo!”

Yumi looked at Moco and nodded.

“Good,” said Moco looking at the palace, lots of airships were approaching on the spot now. Those must be the airships that were equipped with water cannons that can extinguish fires in fast speed.

“Harry...” Yumi muttered

- - -

“Son of a bitch!” swore Rapticon Sr. as he coughed dust and rocks out of his mouth, he tried to stand up but had difficulty thanks to the gash on his leg

“Harry!” Rapticon Sr. called towards the dust

“I am over here!” Harry’s voice called “Is Hermione with you?”

“She’s over here” said Ron, who appeared by Rapticon Sr.’s side
“She’s fine”

“Where’s the King’s body?” Hermione asked, coughing up dust

“Over here” called Harry from afar “There’s a big hole over here and airships are shooting water at the fire... I can’t make any of it! But the king is still on his throne!”

“Where’s Snape!” Ron yelled

“I don’t see him” said Rapticon Sr. looking around the dust “Dammit, he must’ve escaped!”

“What do we do now?” Hermione said loudly

“We need to warn the Council about Snape” said Rapticon Sr. “I know the original plan is that we should get you out of here but this situation is ass huge.”

“Harry?” Hermione called “Harry?”

“I right here” said Harry, walking to them

“Oh, Harry” Hermione said, hugging him

Harry was surprised about this gesture but he couldn’t help it. He patted her back slowly.

“Enough with the mush” said Rapticon Sr. “We need to get out of here”

The party ran for the entrance door. Rapticon Sr. was about to kick it open when the door burst open with the Royal Guard of the castle entered followed by Diana Glacius and the Royal Council and to the group’s horror, Snape.

“There they are, Miss Glacius!” Snape pointed to Harry and the company “The people who killed the King!”

“Killed the king!” exclaimed the tall man, Norman Quagmire “His Majesty is dead!”

"I saw Harry Potter do it!" Snape accused "I peeked into the room and saw him cast the deadly spell, Flare into the king's face! I think he slashed him on the throat!"

"Whoa, whoa, wait!" Rapticon Sr. interjected "We didn't do anything!"

"Then explain your presence here!" Diana ordered

Harry was silent. He couldn't believe what had just happened. They are being accused of killing King Bedeviere by Snape.

"I can explain that" said Snape "As you can see, they have Hermione Grangeré under their custody, I overheard the Dragoon using her as ransom"

"THAT'S NOT TRUE!" Hermione yelled "Snape is a mole, Uncle! Snape is the one who orchestrated the murder of the king with the help of Scipio!"

"That's preposterous!" said Relo Perkins "Sir Severus Snape is an honorary member of the Council for almost a decade! How dare you make such accusations, Miss Grangeré"

"It's the truth!" Hermione shouted "I heard him with my own ears that he planned the whole thing with his superiors!"

"Severus?" Vector Alonzo turned to Snape "Any say on this?"

"Simple. She's confounded under the spell of Rapticon Sr. Raptor" said Snape in a confident manner

"I am not confounded!" Hermione yelled

"Why are you kidnapping the General's daughter!" said a trooper "We saw two of the royal gardeners knocked out in an alley near the castle walls"

Rapticon Sr. slapped his forehead.

“We had to get into the castle” said Rapticon Sr.

“But why in such a rash manner?” asked Diana “What is your agenda?”

“We have no agenda!” Harry shouted “We didn’t kill the king! Why else would we be here? Wouldn’t a professional leave the scene before the authorities appear?”

“The boy is right” said Quentin Vernet, the oldest man in the Council “We can’t jump to any conclusions!”

“But I saw them!” said Snape at once “Potter here slit the king’s throat and performed the spell! Under what pretenses? I don’t know, why don’t you ask him?”

“It is clear that we cannot make a decision here,” said Olaf “My niece is still safe but we can’t let the usual suspects get away before we let them stand trial”

“We can’t stand trial” muttered Rapticon Sr. to Harry “Snape will do anything to let us go to jail”

“Miss Glacius!” called a bangaa Royal Guard from afar “It’s Scipio!”

Everyone scrambled to the scene and saw Scipio coughing up blood. Harry grimaced when he saw one of the shields’ edge pierce through his stomach.

“Scipio!” Glacius gasped as she knelt before him “What happened?”

“I... I – I – I...” Scipio stuttered

“Get us a white mage in here!” yelled Norman Quagmire from behind

“Shhh...” said Diana “just stay calm... we need you to ask you a question”

Scipio slowly looked at Diana and nodded.

“Good” said Diana “Now answer me...”

“He’s going to screw us” said Rapticon Sr. to Harry and Ron “We need to get out of here now”

Rapticon Sr. walked to Hermione.

“Where’s the secret passage?”

Hermione looked at Rapticon Sr. for a moment and with a nod, she pointed toward a wall at the other side of the room.

“Press the brick that looks unnaturally white” said Hermione

Harry surveyed Diana as she looked at Scipio.

“Now tell me, Scipio” said Diana “You were here the whole time, right?”

“Y-y-yes, ma’am” he said weakly

“Then you must be here when this happened, am I correct?”

Scipio nodded as blood started oozing out from his mouth than ever.

“Then I ask you... who did this? Severus said that he saw Harry Potter slit the throat of the king! Is this true?”

Then with all anticipation in everyone’s minds in the room, Scipio opened his mouth and said.

“Severus Snape... is always correct”

And with one last breath, Scipio lay dead on the ground.

“Oh my...” Relo gasped

Diana stood up and looked at Snape.

“I am sorry for judging you, Severus” said Diana with a strict tone

"No apologies needed, Miss Glacius" Snape bowed "But we need to take care of the perpetrators, first"

"Right," Diana nodded

The few moments felt awkward... Diana and Snape just stood there as if waiting for something to happen.

"What now?" Snape asked

"Where's Hermione?" Diana asked

"What?" Snape looked around

During the questioning of Scipio, Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley, Rapticon Sr. with Hermione Grangeré must've escaped under their nose... but how?

"Guards, search the area!" ordered Diana "We just got confirmation that Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley, Rapticon Sr. Raptor killed the king and has kidnapped Hermione Grangeré!"

"Where could they be!" Olaf roared in anger "I trusted Potter! I can't believe it!"

While everyone moved about the destroyed Majestic Hall. Snape was in deep thought... how did they escape?

He looked around the rubble and with one quick glance, he saw a knocked out guard between two large rocks... good enough to go around undetected.

Snape looked beyond and saw the wall where the King's Secret Passageway usually stays.

"Diana!" Snape called

"What is it?" Diana went to Snape

“The criminals took the King’s secret passageway” said Snape, shaking his head.

Chapter Eleven

Flight of The Summoner

Escape.

“Quick!” Ron said as they ran down a flight of stairs “They probably know by now”

“They are probably going down the stairs, you mean!” Harry said

“Don’t worry,” said Rapticon Sr. as they took the twelfth flight of stairs “We are like, miles down the castle now!”

“I still can’t believe it!” said Hermione, following behind Harry “Sir Severus Snape plotted the death of the king!”

“Run now, mourning later” said Rapticon Sr. from the front “Anything we have to worry down here?”

“Apart from possible fiends and monsters? Nothing” Hermione said

The flight of stairs that they were descending had an awful atmosphere. It was a big contrast to the Majestic Hall’s splendor and the fact that the secret passageway leads them to a dark and dirty stairwell almost made Harry feel confused.

“Does this ever end!” Ron complained as they went down their fourteenth flight of stairs

It was a long way down. Harry could smell the unpleasant odor of rotten eggs, burned cabbages and an unclean toilet.

“Does this lead us to the sewers?” Harry turned to Hermione

“That I don’t know” said Hermione “This is the first time I ever entered here”

They finally reached their seventeenth and continued down the eighteenth.

“At least we are going down” said Rapticon Sr. “Imagine if we went up... that would be a run”

Ron shook his head.

“I don’t want to think about it” he gulped

Twentieth flight of stairs...

“Stop!” Harry announced in a sudden fashion

The whole party stopped and looked at Harry.

“What’s wrong?” Ron asked

“I think I hear them...” Harry looked up

Rapticon Sr. closed his eyes and listened carefully... the only thing he can hear is the sounds of water dripping, the air traveling around the area and everyone’s breathing.

“Well?”

Hermione looked up at the ceiling... if they were surely after them, would they be hearing footsteps by now?

Or maybe...

“Oh no...” Hermione gasped

“What?” Harry looked at Hermione

Hermione stroked her brown hair, looking worried.

“What is it!” Harry asked irreverently, he had no time for dramatics

Hermione looked at Harry and said in a small voice

“They are going to the other side of the passageway, the exit”

Then with haste, the party ran the next flight of stairs. If Hermione's theory is correct, the Royal Guard with the Council might be in the end of this passageway waiting for them. Turning back could be a given but knowing the Council, someone might be there waiting for them.

Twenty-third flight of steps

And finally...

Twenty-Fourth.

"Twenty-Four!" Rapticon Sr. sighed as he fell to a wall and started panting "My knees feel weird..."

Harry, Ron and Hermione followed down and rested beside Rapticon Sr.

"That... was wicked" Ron said, panting

"What's next?" Harry asked

The four party members looked to their left and saw nothing but open darkness...

"Uh... should we see something in here?" Hermione asked

"I smell dirty water" Ron grimaced "Blimey, is this the sewers?"

"No," Hermione shook her head "From what I read, the passage is not connected to anything to avoid any compromised situations against the king"

"Well, we need a light" said Rapticon Sr., climbing up the flight of stairs and grabbing the torch (more of these were positioned in every flight twenty-three flights above) and going back down again.

Ron picked up a small rock from the dusty ground and threw it to the darkness. To their expectations, the sound of rock falling into water rang their ears.

"That says a lot" said Harry

"Be careful" said Hermione "Monsters must've multiplied in here since the passage's use ten years ago"

"Then how did they get in here?" Ron asked

"Tiny monsters," said Hermione "They probably entered here through some crack and then they evolve through time making them to stronger beings"

"We'll watch hold our asses on a tighter leash then" said Rapticon Sr.

Rapticon Sr. walked forward slowly into the darkness. He looked left, right and forward. He jumped back by a little bit when he stepped on a low platform which was filled with shallow water.

"Jesus!" he said as he shook the slimy water from his boot "That'll stink all day!"

"Sir," said Harry "Look"

Rapticon Sr. looked forward and seeing that the torch lit a part of the dark area, he lifted it higher to give them a better lit view of the place.

Beyond them was a long passage into another great deal of the darkness. It was a half-flooded tunnel of murky and slimy water. A small boat with oars was resting on the side of the tunnel stealthily.

"Bingo" said Rapticon Sr. walking towards the boat and dragging it towards them

"Ew..." Hermione waved the smell from her nose

"My boots will be fine" said Rapticon Sr. as he took the oars out
"Quick, get in"

“Me?” Hermione looked at Rapticon Sr. with wide-eyes

“It’s a courtesy for a man to allow women to go first before he does” said Rapticon Sr. “Do you want lessons on male courtesy?” he added with an irate tone

“No,” Hermione shook her head “But...” she stared at the dark tunnel

“We’ll be safe” said Harry “Trust us”

Hermione looked at Harry. For a second there, Harry thought he saw Hermione looking at him with a doubtful expression.

“I may have come this far” Hermione said “But am I supposed to know that you won’t push the boat the moment I step in? Remember that I still have yet to sink in the recent events that has happened so my trust on the three of you is on a provisional basis”

“You’re saying you don’t trust me?”

“Yes”

“...” Rapticon Sr. gave Hermione a blank look “Harry, pamper her up”

Harry walked up to Hermione and said in a kind voice.

“Hermione, you have to trust us” he looked at the boat “I know that boat looks dangerous but you have our word, we won’t hurt you in any way. Look, the moment you get in, I’ll follow and watch your back, okay?”

Hermione gave Harry a halfhearted look, she sighed, gave a nod and with a quick step, she took a seat on one of the boats. Harry followed and sat beside her. Rapticon Sr. and Ron followed and sat on the opposite side of Harry and Hermione’s seat. Rapticon Sr. saw a slot at the front of the boat and using common sense, he placed the torch inside the slot which has now serves as their light.

“Okay now,” said Harry, taking an oar and giving the other to Ron
“Push gently”

Ron and Harry, at the same time, pushed the boat away from the wall with the oars. They moved slightly and with one last push off the wall by a boat of Rapticon Sr., the slow current carried them into the dark depths of the tunnel.

“Watch out for anything fishy” said Rapticon Sr. “Literally and figuratively”

Harry watched his side, he could only see his reflection on the surface of the murky black water which rippled gently as their boat began to pick up a little speed. He studied the face of Hermione, who looked calm. He had this urge to hold her shoulder and tell her that everything is alright but after what has happened, he still feels unready for anything but getting out of here.

“You know,” said Ron “During Dragoon training, our trainers would say that fiends would use the ceilings to their advantage in dark areas such as this place”

Everyone looked up and expected a large lizard to pounce them. Fortunately, no such expectation existed. Harry breathed deeply, he realized how hungry and sweaty he is right now. He checked the water again and saw his reflection.

“I see a jump” said Rapticon Sr. who has taken the duty of navigator
“Hold on tight”

For a brief moment, the boat made a small drop from a low height and with a loud splash, they continued down the dark tunnel.

“This place stinks” said Ron “I can’t see anything beyond the light”

Harry squinted further and noticed something moving within the edges of the light and dark. It looked long and slimy...

“I – I see something!” Harry said

As if Harry's voice was a signal, the long and slimy thing quickly slithered down to the water making a loud splash.

"I heard that" said Ron, turning behind him

"Watch the waters, Harry, Hermione" Rapticon Sr. said, drawing his hammer out

Harry and Hermione looked around the edge of the boat, they examined beyond the boat's ripples. If something was moving towards them, they would see ripples that took a different direction.

"Blimey, I wonder how many guards died here to protect the king during his escape" said Ron "For a secret passage, it is very dangerous"

"Let us say that the secret passageway isn't a very high quality job" said Hermione

"Sure but this is about getting the king out to safety!"

"When you are a national or world leader, you are never safe" said Rapticon Sr. "Everyday, someone around the planet is plotting your death or probably planning a way to get you out of office through means of harsh negotiations"

"Exactly" said Hermione frowning "That's why I dislike it when people tell me that I am fit to take the throne"

"Really?" Ron looked at her in admiration

"Yes," Hermione looked down "I was considered the 'Face of Royal Politics' since I would help the kingdom in any way possible"

"Do you like doing it?" Harry asked

"Yes" said Hermione smiling "It's a blast since I get to meet new people from different continents, I also get to put in my two gils on the current events"

“Voice of the youth?” Rapticon Sr. looked at Hermione

“Something like that” said Hermione “Though, the problem is... I am never allowed to walk freely to the other districts to meet other ‘same-age-kids’ to get a genuine opinion from them” she smiled weakly

“Your father must be rolling heads right now” said Ron, looking up

“I wish I can tell him that I am not hurt” said Hermione “He always cared for me”

“You will when we get things settled” said Rapticon Sr.

Splash!

Everyone turned their heads to the right. A large set of ripples formed within the light range. Rapticon Sr. raised his hammer and looked at Harry, who drew his sword out. Ron turned around while he continued rowing the boat. Hermione looked around the vicinity while she hugged her knees.

“I think it’s gone” said Ron

Harry lowered his sword and sat down beside Hermione. He shrugged to Rapticon Sr. who, in response, lowered his hammer.

“So Ron, did you see anything – ?”

Harry froze. Behind Ron, a long tentacle rose from the water. Before Harry could warn Ron, the tentacle whipped through the boat and whacked Ron to the water below. The oars fell to the murky water afterwards.

“RON!” Harry yelled trying to jump in after him

“Harry, don’t!” Rapticon Sr. yelled “It will be useless if you get caught too”

“Then what do we do?” Harry shouted

“AHHHH!” Ron yelled as he withdrew to the surface

A tentacle was wrapped around Ron’s neck. Ron struggled to fight it back with his fist but everything failed for him for the tentacle’s favor.

“Ron!” Harry looked at his best friend hopelessly

“We got to get closer to it!” Rapticon Sr. crouched down and using his wide raptor claws, he dipped his right hand to the water and started peddling towards Ron and the rogue tentacle.

“Get your damn sword ready!” said Rapticon Sr.

Harry withdrew his sword to a battle stance and with the current picking up fast. They were this close to catching up.

“We are coming, Ron!” Harry looked at Rapticon Sr. “Can you make it like the boat is facing the monster sideways?”

“I dunno” said Rapticon Sr., who stopped paddling “But this might –“

Rapticon Sr. dipped his hammer to the water and with a squishy ‘thud’, the boat made an abrupt turn to the right, making it sail sideways.

“Here we go!” Rapticon Sr. said, going into battle stance “Hermione, we could use some help here!”

Hermione nodded and stood up. She summoned her rod from thin air and went into battle stance.

- - -

“Yumi, Yumi!” Moco shook the shoulder of Yumi

“What?” Yumi said, abandoning the cart

Moco pointed towards the square outside of the alley and to Yumi’s surprised, a squad of seven Royal Guards entered with Royal Council members Vector Alonzo, Relo Perkins and Severus Snape.

“What in Bahamut’s name are they doing here?” Yumi said

“I think they know about us, kupo!” said Moco “They must have!”

“Don’t be stupid, Moco” said Yumi “By the looks of it, they are not searching... they are heading towards someplace else”

“Kupo, do you think it’s related to the explosion?” Moco looked at Yumi thoughtfully

“Could be... but if Harry and the others did that...” Yumi rubbed her chin “Then the guards must be going to the exit of the secret passageway!”

“How are you sure of that?”

“Look, Moco” said Yumi “Rapticon Sr. told us that they will escape through the escape route of the king. The guards are here in the Citizen District, the place where we allegedly think the exit is and who could know about the exit better than us?”

“Council members, kupo?” Moco tilted his head

“Exactly!” said Yumi “Now quick, get on the cart, we’ll follow them to the escape route’s exit!”

“Kupo!” Moco fluttered to Yumi’s face “We can’t do that! We’ll be in big trouble!”

“We will keep our distance” Yumi said, riding on the cart’s driving seat “Y’know, act casual”

“But we don’t want to get in trouble, kupo!” Moco landed beside her

“Hey, Harry and the others need us” said Yumi “and if they caught, there is no way they can get out of this one”

Before Moco could speak, Yumi added

“And who knows? Harry, Ron and Rapticon Sr. would’ve done the same for us if we were the ones going towards the exit”

Moco looked down in disappointment of himself.

“Wow, kupo... I – I forgot about how Harry’s a good friend to me”
Moco looked at Yumi “He would buy me kupo nuts everyday, kupo!”

Then with a punch on his tiny little palms, Moco nodded to Yumi with determination to help Harry.

“That’s the Moogle spirit!” Yumi smiled “Ready, Choc?”

“Kweh!” Choco squeaked

“Follow the Royal Guards, just keep your distance, okay?”

“Kweh! Wark! Cue!” Choco squawked in acknowledgement

The two were on the move towards the marching Royal Guards.

- - -

“Dammit!” Harry swore as he nearly fell to the water below

“I got you!” Hermione said, grabbing Harry by the scruff of the neck

It’s been one crazy battle, when Rapticon Sr. drew first blood by hammering the tentacle from its grasp of Ron, three to five tentacles popped out. The waves and strong current made the boat wobble wildly but thanks to the weight of Harry, Hermione and Rapticon Sr., they controlled the boat from toppling over. Now with sweat, dirty water and some small wounds (from offending tentacles), the three party members went into battle ready poses.

“Hermione, is it too much to ask for a summon?” Rapticon Sr. asked, looking at the tentacles

“I can’t do that” Hermione said quickly

“At least I tried,” said Rapticon Sr. and raising his left hand, he yelled “FIRE!”

A ball of fire erupted among the group of tentacles behind Ron causing the tentacles to flail violently.

“You can learn black magic?” Harry looked at Rapticon Sr. in amazement

“Mercenaries are equipped with that spell only. Comes in handy at times”

“H-H-HARRY!” Ron yelled as he fought back the tentacles with his armored braces “THROWING KNIFE!”

“Sir!” Harry looked at Rapticon Sr. “Throwing knife!”

Rapticon Sr.’s eyes widened with realization. He took his last throwing knife from the back of his belt and with a fast throw, the knife pierced through the tentacle that held Ron in captivity.

“Ah!” Ron yelped as he dropped to the water below

“Harry!” Rapticon Sr. called “Try to protect Ron as much as you can, I’ll take care of this bastard!”

“What will you do?” Harry yelled amidst the chaos

“Just do it!”

Harry saw in shock as Rapticon Sr. peddled the boat towards the monster and when the boat was close enough, Rapticon Sr. coiled down and jumped towards the tentacles.

“PROFESSOR!” Harry yelled

“For the last time - !” Rapticon Sr. yelled as he landed on the base of the tentacles with a squishy landing “ – I am – “ he dodged a tentacle and hammered it down to death “ – not – “ he took a combat knife

from his boot and stabbed one multiple times “ – your teacher – “ he then ducked as two were about to grab his neck “ – in this world!”

“Harry, Ron!” Hermione pointed

Harry saw Ron swimming towards the boat, Harry saw a tentacle going towards Ron.

“Ron! Behind you!” Harry called as he was prepared to jump it with his sword.

There was no need to.

The tentacle took a quick shot towards Ron but before it could touch him, a circular barrier with hexagonal shapes materialized between them. The tentacle flinched only to receive a fiery blaze from Rapticon Sr.’s fire magic.

“What?” Harry looked at Hermione

Hermione, who was standing up and raising her hands, was shining a white glow. She looked at Ron and with a stronger glow, she gave Harry the impression that she was protecting Ron with her white magic.

“Get him!” Hermione said to Harry

Harry reached Ron’s hand and pulled him to the boat. Ron gasped for air as he lay on the boat’s surface.

“Easy, buddy” said Harry, taking a potion and uncorking it. Like before, the bottle emitted strings of green light and circulated Ron letting him feel relaxed.

“Thanks, mate” said Ron

“You’d do the same if I were you” said Harry, smirking

“ARGH!” Rapticon Sr. growled

Harry looked behind him and saw Rapticon Sr. struggling with the tentacles as the organic base rose up revealing the mastermind of the fiends.

“An O-Ochu!” Harry looked at it “I thought that was a land creature!”

“It must’ve adapted to the environment!” Hermione said “Harry, we must do something!”

“Protect him” said Harry “Like you did for Ron!”

“I can’t do it frequently since I am not a qualified White Mage! I only know a few white magic since a Summoner is a cousin to the white mage!” Hermione responded

“I could use a hand here, Harry!” Rapticon Sr. shouted

“Can you at least summon - ?”

“HARRY, WE DON’T HAVE MUCH TIME!” Rapticon Sr. yelled as he wrestled with a tentacle

“Then at least try” said Harry, looking at Hermione desperately

“But if I push my limitations, I might collapse!” Hermione cried

“PLEASE, HERMIONE!” Harry yelled, holding her by the shoulders

Seeing what he did, Harry quickly let go of Hermione and took a deep breath.

“F-Fine” said Hermione weakly “I will try”

Hermione turned to the Ochu versus Rapticon Sr. scenario and raised her hands to the air. Harry looked in slight guilt as Hermione gave a very faint glow. He saw her eyes were shut tight. It looked like she was pushing something very hard.

“BE QUICK!” Rapticon Sr. shouted as he bent backward to avoid a tentacle

Hermione started to glow brighter and brighter. Harry saw her looking up at the ceiling as her hair started rippling in the surrounding wind that was building up around her.

Then with a flash of light, Hermione lowered her arms as a jet of light flew towards the Ochu and with a direct physical contact, the Ochu started screeching as its tentacles started drooping. The Ochu's green skin started to turn slimy and blackened with decaying features. Harry saw in amazement the "Zombie" status effect affecting the Ochu as Hermione fell to her knees taking very deep breaths.

"Hermione!" Harry ran to her as he kneeled before her "I – I'm so sorry!" he hugged her tightly "I shouldn't have pushed you too hard!"

But Hermione didn't respond, she looked too drowsy and tired to speak. Harry looked at Rapticon Sr. who was now dropping a bottle of Phoenix Down (a reviving remedy) on the Ochu's head. The "Zombie" status effect reverses curing items and magic causing them to do damage than to heal. The move proved effective since the Ochu was now slowly sinking to the watery depths.

"Are you three, okay?" Rapticon Sr. said after he jumped from the Ochu's head and onto the boat

"I am fine" said Ron, sitting up

"I am too" said Harry "But I don't think Hermione is..."

Rapticon Sr. and Ron looked at Hermione. She was seated next to Harry. She wasn't knocked out nor was she asleep but her eyes were half-open and she was taking in slow deep breaths.

The raptor examined Hermione's eyes. He forced them open gently and examined it through the torch's light. He took a step back and said

"She just pushed her limit" he looked at Harry "You should've done something else"

“I – I know” said Harry in a panicked voice “I can’t believe I made her like this!”

“Harry, Harry!” Ron said, raising his hand “Calm down, she’s fine, she’s just in a state that she has to go through”

Harry nodded slowly after reflecting on this. He sat down beside Hermione and looked at her. He bowed his head down in guilt and started pondering on what just happened.

“We better move” said Rapticon Sr. “That son of a bitch just gave the Royal Guards time to surround us”

A few minutes later, the boat caught itself to the current. The Ochu must’ve held up the current since after its defeat, they were riding faster now. Luckily, no fiends were in the way this time.

“Hermione?” Ron asked, snapping his fingers in front of her “Hermione?”

“Leave her alone” said Rapticon Sr., wiping his face with a face towel “Here, wipe your face”

Harry looked up as he saw Ron wiping his dirty face. He was able to smell everyone properly now that they are in the right circumstances. Harry wished they took a bath afterwards, everyone smells awful.

“Remind me to rent an inn with a private shower when we get to Skyld” said Ron, thinking the exact same thought as Harry

The journey down the tunnel went on. They started to see rays of light in the end. They must be near.

“We’re here” said Rapticon Sr. “Harry, check if Hermione is capable of walking”

Harry looked at Hermione.

“Hermione?” he looked at her “Hermione?”

Hermione looked at Harry with a look that made him feel uneasy. She looked tired but she smiled and nodded.

“I – I am fine” she said finally but tiredly “I can walk”

The boat stopped to an abrupt halt. Rapticon Sr. jumped out of it and onto the bricked shores of another flight of staircases.

“Let’s go” Harry said as he helped Hermione out of the boat

“C’mon” said Ron

Rapticon Sr. looked up at the set of staircase and concentrated on listening...

No sounds of footsteps or voices...

“I think its clear” said Rapticon Sr. “But keep a close watch on each other”

Harry noticed Rapticon Sr. talking quietly. He reckons the Royal Guard must be up there, wherever they are.

“Better get ready for any fights” said Rapticon Sr.

“I can walk, Harry” said Hermione in a hollow sort of voice “I am fine”

Harry let go of Hermione’s waist and allowed her to walk. She looked numb but she could walk, at least.

“I pray it won’t be another twenty-four sets of stairs” Ron said worriedly

“Let’s just see then” said Rapticon Sr. and looked at Ron “After you”

Ron sighed and went up the stairs with Rapticon Sr., Harry and Hermione at his wake. The boat drifted away from the bricked shores and disappeared into the darkness as the torch extinguished itself as it reached its due.

Walking up the set of stairs, the party went up two flights of stairs. During the trip up another set of steps, Harry would turn to Hermione from time to time. She looks capable of walking but her tired look makes Harry wonder how she still has the strength to pull herself.

“Hermione, are you sure you’re fine?” Ron asked from behind

“Yes... Ron is the name, right?” Hermione said looking at Ron

Ron gave her a surprised look. Obviously, in her current state, she doesn’t know Ron at a personal level since their meeting at the trophy room until now hasn’t merit them time to at least have a proper introduction.

“Yeah” Ron replied with a grim look in his face

“Guys,” Rapticon Sr. pulled to a stop “I think we’re here”

Harry recalled climbing seven flights of steps. He looked in front of Rapticon Sr. and saw a solid wall. The darkness that surrounded them produced an outline of white lines around the solid wall. The outlines must be light protruding from the outside.

“Do we push or do we say ‘friend’ in Elvish?” Rapticon Sr. looked at Hermione

“How should I know?” she said weakly

“Maybe...” Ron walked forward and examined the outlines “I can see what’s on the other side”

Ron peeked through the outlines of the wall and shrugged.

“I can’t see anything but light” said Ron “So what do you reckon, Harry?”

“Magic?” Harry looked at Rapticon Sr.

“Mercenary magic is weak and I doubt this wall will fall apart by magic” Rapticon Sr. said

“Why don’t we push it?” Harry looked at the three of them “At least try”

The four walked towards the solid wall and, exchanging looks, gave the solid wall a push. To their surprise, the wall budged making a grinding noise of stone dragging on wood.

“It’s working!” Harry gasped as he pushed the wall “Keep pushing!”

Harry noticed Hermione not pushing the solid wall but rather holding it while walking forward.

The pushing of the wall has ended. They realized it spun on a center axis making it spin around whenever pushed.

“Yumi’s uncle was right” said Rapticon Sr. “The secret passage leads us to an old house”

They were at a living room of a dusty, old house. Everything from the moth-eaten sofas to the cobwebbed chandelier and the broken architecture just told them that this was the perfect place for the king to escape at. No assassin would think twice of searching this place.

“There are citizens outside” Rapticon Sr. looked through the dusty windows and started walking out of the living room “If we are fast enough, we can make our way to the square undetected and –“

“HALT!” yelled a voice as the speaker came from his hiding place beside the living room exit.

Hermione gasped while Ron and Harry looked on.

It was Vector Alonzo, the handsome faced member of the Royal Council. He looked at Rapticon Sr. with a piercing stare and aimed a brass pistol at the raptor.

“Uncle Vector!” Hermione said in a weak voice

“Hermione, stay calm” said Vector, looking at her “You are safe now, the Royal Guards are here”

“Uncle, you don’t understand!” Hermione said “I – It’s Sir Severus Snape! He’s behind all of this!”

Hermione’s voice was nothing but a croak. Harry wished he didn’t tell her to use strong magic.

“Hamilton, I’ve got them!” called Vector

The sound of marching armor echoed the living room as seven Royal Guards entered. Three held their spears towards Rapticon Sr. while two held Harry and Ron while the latter stood by Hermione’s side like guards.

“Take Hermione out of here” said Vector “Now”

“Listen to Hermione!” Harry said but backed off as a guard raised his spear towards his chin “Please!”

“That’s Miss Grangeré to you!” said a new voice

It was Snape.

Harry, Ron, Hermione and Rapticon Sr. glared at Snape as he entered the room with his black cape following him.

“I knew they’d use the passageway” said Snape as he crossed his arms “My, my, my... you three has caused quite a lot of damage today, hmm?”

He walked towards Rapticon Sr. and looked at him.

“You broke into the castle premises without permission,” he went to Ron “Attempted to kidnap Miss Grangeré and...” he walked to Harry “assassinated two royal subjects! Do you have any idea what this means for you?”

“He’s lying!” Hermione yelled with every sound in her voice “I was there when he confessed! Please, uncle! I would never lie to you!”

“Calm down, Hermione!” Vector said, lowering his gun “We will get white mages to heal you from your confound state –“

“I AM NOT CONFOUNDED! I AM AS SANE AS YOU ARE!”
Hermione yelled

“She’s telling the truth” said Rapticon Sr.

“Silence!” Snape snapped “After your choice of the secret path of the king I find all of you the worst fugitives I ever heard of!”

“Easy there, Leroy” Rapticon Sr. muttered

Harry saw Vector walking up to Hermione as he checked on her. He noticed Hermione’s weak state since her hands were trembling.

“Why are your hands shaking, dear?” he asked her

“I – I had to use magic” said Hermione, gulping

“Did they do this to you?” Vector asked

“I – I did it out of defense from the monsters that crawl below there” she looked at the secret passageway’s exit “I used too much and now I am weak”

Harry felt a surge of relief and a drop of remorse when Hermione didn’t mention that it was him that forced her to use magic beyond her skill.

“What’s going on here?”

A new arrival has arrived. It was Relo Perkins, the stout Council member with glasses. He walked quickly to Hermione and looked at her.

“Is she alright, Vector?”

"She's fine, Relo" said Vector "Severus guesses she is under confound status"

"I am not confounded" Hermione snapped

"Hermione," Vector said, not taking in a word she said "Before we left for this place, Diana Glacius has decided to tell your father about this. We think she told him that you are safe since she trust that we would get to you in time"

"Fortunately, we did" Snape sneered "It's only a matter of time that they will be brought to justice"

"LIAR!" Ron shouted

"Restrain him to a tighter leash, Beezo" Snape said to the bangaa guard

The bangaa guard took Ron by the scruff of his neck, dropped him to the ground and aimed his spear on Ron's forehead.

"Don't hurt them, please!" Hermione said

"Hermione, we know your terms on hurting prisoners" said Relo kindly "But remember that they kidnapped you and killed the king and Scipio at the same time!"

"Scipio is dead?" Hermione looked at Relo

"Yes, Hermione" Relo nodded sadly

For a fraction of a second there, he saw a glint of satisfaction in Hermione's eyes. The same look of satisfaction that came whenever she got a high grade on her homework, or when she read her favorite book and specifically, the same look that came when she punched Malfoy at the face during their third year.

"I am sorry" Hermione said apathetically

“It wasn’t your fault, dear” said Relo, waving his hand “Scipio was a good man, but first, we need to get you to a white mage –“

“Before you move to whatever” said Rapticon Sr. “I think it would interest you that we have fire-starters planted around the castle right now”

Everyone looked at Rapticon Sr. and to Harry’s surprised, he was smirking.

“Fire-starters?” Vector looked at him with wide eyes “At the castle?”

“You heard me right, sir” said Rapticon Sr.

Harry looked at Rapticon Sr.’s hands and expected to see a hidden knife or something but the way Rapticon Sr.’s fingers moved... it looked like he was pointing to something. He must’ve known Harry was looking at his hands since Rapticon Sr. was making unmistakable pointing gestures towards the window nearby.

Harry followed the direction and outside of the dusty window, he saw a cart with a Chocobo... the green cloth that dressed the Chocobo said that it was Moco’s Chocobo, Choco.

Yumi...

“You are going to tell us where they are” said Vector in a threatening voice “Or else we will beat it out of you, as much as I resent such methods”

“Why would I?” Rapticon Sr. spat back “The king is dead there is nothing we can do”

“Is that a confession?” Snape snapped

“Nope,” said Rapticon Sr. “That was a diversion”

“The death of the king is a diversion!” Vector aimed his pistol at Rapticon Sr. “What greater damage can you possibly achieve that can surpass the assassination of His Majesty!”

"I didn't say any of that crap, Rizal" Rapticon Sr. mocked "I meant this"

Rapticon Sr. ducked all of a sudden. Harry wondered what was going on but after a few seconds, a black ball fell from above and emitted gray smoke.

"What!" Vector looked on as a second black ball of smoke emitted from the other side

"YAH!"

The Council members saw Rapticon Sr. leg sweep the three guards that guarded him and knocked Vector of his feet as he disarmed him. He tossed the gun in the air and with a one swipe of his claws, Rapticon Sr. aimed the pistol at Snape

"HARRY!" he called

Harry took this time to his advantage, he drew out his sword and knocked the guard out with his large blade before he could retaliate. The bangaa guard that guarded Ron was now coughing as smoke thickened the room.

"Ron!" Harry called through the smoke

"I am here!"

"Don't let them escape!" yelled Snape "Guards, don't let them take Miss Grangeré!"

"AH!" yelled one of the guards

"Oomf!" one of them groaned

Harry looked through the smoke and saw the familiar figure of Yumi Kusamari. She kicked the second guard with her foot and turned to Harry.

“Missed me?”

“I am so glad you’re here” Harry gasped in relief

“Get Hermione!” yelled Rapticon Sr. “NOW!”

“Okay,” said Yumi

Harry ran towards Yumi’s area and looked for Hermione, who was crouching behind a couch.

“Hermione, c’mon!” Harry said, taking her by the hand

“Not so fast!” yelled Vector through the smoke

Bang!

Hermione screamed. Harry saw Rapticon Sr. shooting above the ceiling.

“LET’S GO!” he yelled

The five party members ran out of the room and out of the house.

“The cart is this way” said Yumi, pointing to the right “Moco is waiting for us”

“Good” said Ron

Everyone ran towards Moco’s direction. Momentarily, the cart came to view as they took a turn around the old house.

“What did you do!” Hermione demanded from Rapticon Sr. while running “Did you shoot anyone!”

“No” said Rapticon Sr. “I shot the ceiling so the three will think I am firing upon them forcing them to stand down”

“MOCO, GET CHOCO READY!” yelled Yumi

Harry saw a Moogles from afar jumping out of the cart. Moco looked at them in surprised and held the reins of the Chocobo.

“Get in, quick” Rapticon Sr. said, helping Yumi up the cart “Ron, next”

Ron went up then Hermione with the help of Harry. Rapticon Sr. followed suit.

“What in kupo’s name happened!” Moco asked

“We’ll explain later!” Harry said “Just take us to –”

“The airship port” said Rapticon Sr. “NOW”

“Kupo, okay, okay, okay!” said Moco, whipping the reins “Let’s go Choco!”

“Kweh!” squawked the yellow bird as it gain speed and ran down the pathway while pulling its burden behind it.

- - -

“SHE IS WHAT?” yelled Jacques Grangeré

“Jacques!” said Diana “Before I could get into more detail, we must let you know that Severus Snape, Relo Perkins and Vector Alonzo are now heading to the place where they are. They must be there right now so I ask you to calm down!”

“Calm down! My daughter has been kidnapped by the people, who you said, that killed the king! Seeing their capabilities, I think I am sufficed to not calm down!”

“Yes, I know that but we have to pull ourselves together and do what has to be done or else we’ll never save your daughter and capture the criminals” said Diana “Olaf has taken control of all possible exits around the city. The city main entrance has been sealed off for any possible escape”

Jacques stood from his desk and looked out of the window looking lost. Diana sighed. She knew how worried and shaken he is... he loved Hermione so much and she was the only thing that meant to him right now.

“Jacques...” said Diana calmly “I know you want to do something about this but let Council and the Royal Guard handle this”

“But my daughter...”

“She will be fine” said Diana “You have to trust us on this. The only things you can do is hope for the best and get these classified documents to the kingdom of Dragool”

Jacques raked his brown hair. He didn’t know what to do anymore... his daughter is in grave danger.

“Jacques?”

“I – I am fine” said Jacques “I’ll do it, I’ll send the documents” he nodded to Diana

“I’ll be checking how things are going” said Diana “Take care”

“Thank you, Diana”

- - -

“RIGHT!” yelled Yumi

Everyone held on tight as Moco steered Choco to the right of the road. Avoiding citizens as they passed by, Harry saw that there was a large squad of Royal Guards marching towards them.

“Is there any way we can get around?” Rapticon Sr. said

“Um – not to add to the misery or anything” said Ron “but they’re here!”

The guards that have been chasing them from the square near Celes Hotel appeared from the last street they came from.

“IN THE NAME OF THE KINGDOM, STOP!” yelled a guard

“How’s Hermione, Harry?” Ron asked

“She’s fine” said Harry

Hermione was sitting down while she covered her face.

The cart picked up speed as it ran down the street. Dozens of passersby dodge the runaway cart causing civil unrest within the area.

“Great! We’re closer!” Yumi said, seeing a familiar shop pass by

Bang!

“Crap!” Rapticon Sr. said as everyone duck “They’re shooting at us!”

“Gunnners!” yelled Moco as he started making slalom turns

Harry peeked and saw lots of Royal Guard gunners appearing from each of side of the streets.

Bang!

“Woah!” Ron crouched “I think they are trying to destroy the cart!”

Harry was about to stand but with quick reflexes, he dodged another shot of a gunner. The missed shot broke a part of the cart.

“Oh my god! They almost killed Harry!” Rapticon Sr. yelled in panic

“You bastards!” Ron shook a fist at them

“Uh, guys?” Yumi said in a worried voice

“What?” the three males looked at Yumi

“We got a road block ahead” she pointed

A few feet away, a line of Royal Guards were standing on the road with their spears at ready. A few gunners were behind the frontline with their guns at ready aim.

“Oh my Merlin” Ron gasped “What do we do now?”

“We think, that’s what we’ll do!” Rapticon Sr. replied impatiently

Harry looked around the area where the guards are. There were running citizens, a small kiosk of fruits and goods and a building that’s under construction.

“Sir,” Harry called Rapticon Sr. “Will anything up there help?”

Rapticon Sr. looked at the construction site and up above around the edge of a low structure was stacked logs.

“Eureka” whispered Rapticon Sr. “Good job, Harry”

The raptor drew out Vector’s brass pistol and aimed at the logs harness which kept the logs from rolling anywhere. It was almost impossible to accomplish but it had to be done.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

“AH!” Ron jumped

“It’s only me!” said Rapticon Sr., he observed the logs. He missed.

“What the hell are you doing!” Ron demanded

“I am getting us out of here!” said Rapticon Sr. “Yumi!”

“What!”

“Are you good at throw sharp objects?”

“I – I can’t say that I am –“

“Yes or no?” Rapticon Sr. looked at her

Yumi winced

“I guess so”

“Good enough,” said Rapticon Sr. “We don’t have much time, use this –“ he drew out his combat knife and gave it to Yumi “ – and throw it towards the set of logs over there. Try to throw it to cut the harness, okay?”

“Okay” said Yumi “What happens if I miss?”

“Don’t miss” Rapticon Sr. said “Or else we are totally screwed”

Yumi looked at the combat knife nervously. She gazed the distant construction site and line of guards. The set of logs were there waiting for her... it was now or never.

“Wait till we reach a good distance” said Rapticon Sr.

Bang!

“Yumi!” Harry yelled as gunners from behind started shooting again

“That was close!” Yumi gasped as she crouched a little

“YUMI!” pointed Rapticon Sr.

Yumi turn around and saw the logs. She raised her arms and aimed at the harness... thank the Sentinels the ropes were thick as a boa constrictor!

She remembered her training on knife throwing. It’s every thief’s job to use accuracy and precision at all times in knife throwing.

“Now!” yelled Rapticon Sr.

The young thief tossed the knife with a fast throw. The knife flew across the air and, with luck on their side, the knife's sharp blade cut the harness.

"Yeehaw!" Yumi cheered

The logs started rolling along the surface above. It continued rolling down the surface and with one full sweep, the logs started rolling down the streets causing the road block to disperse in panic as it started raining logs.

"Nice one, Yumi" said Ron

"Full speed, Moco!" said Harry

Moco made a "kupo" sound and whipped the reins of Choco. The yellow bird ran so fast that the streets and cityscape were now blurred. Harry felt the wind whipping his face together with his companions.

"Another right here!" said Rapticon Sr.

The Chocobo turned right and crossed a narrow road. Then a left and another right and in a few minutes, they finally found themselves in BronzeWings Port.

"C'mon" said Harry as everyone got out "Hermione!"

Hermione followed Harry with everyone else towards the entrance of BronzeWings. The whole party stopped at the entrance gate.

"This is a public port, kupo" said Moco "What happened to the original plan?"

"Someone disrupted us" said Harry "We need to get out of this city and fast"

"Wait, wait!" Yumi said "Don't tell me you're just going to leave us here!"

“We won’t because you’re coming us” said Rapticon Sr. at once

“What!” Yumi and Moco said in unison “B-but I thought –“

“If they catch you, they will try to link you with the assassination of King Bedeviere –“

“Assassination, kupo!” Moco gasped

“King Bedeviere!” Yumi clapped her mouth “Did the explosion - ?”

“No, the king was murdered by his own Royal Adviser, Scipio” said Ron “We’ll explain everything later!”

“This is kupo!” said Moco “You owe us an explanation”

“Deal” said Harry, looking around for guards “Let’s just get ourselves out of here”

“But what about Choco?” Moco looked at his Chocobo “I – I can’t leave him here! And my father too!”

“You father will be fine” said Rapticon Sr. “Besides, no one will know who you are. As for Choco, take him to this ship... it’s on docking bay three”

“What is it?” Moco asked

“Before this whole mess started, I checked the schedules and I ran across a Chocobo transporter heading for Skyld. I want you and Yumi to get Choco in there and hide inside the ship. We’ll meet you there” Rapticon Sr. said

Yumi and Moco looked at Rapticon Sr. with half-open jaws.

“Trust me, please” said Rapticon Sr. “We will work things out, I promise!”

Then with a nod, Yumi and Moco ran inside the entrance of the BronzeWings Port.

“Sir!” Harry pointed

Royal Guards were now approaching from afar.

“Get in!” said Rapticon Sr.

The party of four ran inside the entrance of the port. The port’s interior was open with lots of chairs for waiting travelers. Rooms for offices, stockrooms and possibly, restrooms were around the place. Five hallways with labels of “1”, “2”, “3”, “4”, “5” for each stretched from the room they were at.

“We need to split” said Rapticon Sr.

“Who will take the gun?” asked Ron

“Do you know how to shoot a gun?”

“While I was training to be a Dragoon, there was an ex-Mercenary who taught me how to shoot a pistol during free times” said Ron

Rapticon Sr. looked reluctant but he sighed and said

“Fine, will settle this with rock, paper and scissors!”

“Rock, paper, scissors? Are you mad!” Hermione said

“SHHH!” Rapticon Sr. shushed “Ready?”

“Um... yeah” said Ron

“Rock, paper, scissors – “

Ron was a rock and Rapticon Sr. was a pair of scissors.

“Argh! God dammit!” Rapticon Sr. swore

“Now is not the time to be a sore loser!” Hermione said “Look!”

The party looked outside and saw the Royal Guard marching towards them. At this moment, Rapticon Sr. drew out his pistol and shot the door's edges. This caused the guards to run for cover as everyone inside the port started screaming and running.

"Harry, Ron, Hermione, run!" said Rapticon Sr. "They are probably inside the building, find a place to hide and we'll meet each other on Docking Bay three!"

The three Hogwarts students ran inside docking bay two. After a trip down a long hallway, they entered a docking bay that made Harry see an airship for the first time in a closer range.

Atrynömunal airships were known to be massive, made of steel and fast. Harry remembered reading at Moco's library that airships were symbols of freedom in the land. Owning one for yourself is considered a great luxury even surpassing the treat of being a king.

"Down here" said Ron

Harry held Hermione's wrist and put her close to him. The trio passed by airships that differ in shape and sizes. It was at the fourth ship that a group of Royal Guards entered from the other end of the bay.

"Huh!" Ron suddenly dived behind a box of crates while Harry and Hermione backed behind the large airship opposite of Ron.

"That was close" said Hermione

"Ron!" Harry whispered loudly

"You guys go and find a place to hide" said Ron "I'll be fine behind these crates just go and hide in one of the airships! Don't forget, docking bay three!"

Harry nodded to Ron and escorted Hermione towards another port within the bay. The marching of the guards faded away when they reached the first airship they passed. A ramp of the airship was down for anyone who wanted to enter. Out of the pace of the recent events, the two entered the ship.

“We’ll be fine here” said Harry, pressing a button that raised the ramp.

“I’ll say” said Hermione

It was at this moment that Harry realized they took the wrong ship.

“Hello!” said a high pitched voice of a middle-aged lady

Harry jumped as Hermione remained calm. She must be used to all of the sudden greetings.

“Er – hello” Hermione replied calmly

“Oooh, you must be new arrivals!” said the lady in glee “I am Mrs. Otto and I’ll be one of the many stewardess (or stewards) of the ‘Honeymoon Delight’!”

Harry and Hermione froze.

“Sorry, what?” Harry asked

“The ‘Honeymoon Delight’!” said the Mrs. Otto, smiling “It is a two-way trip to the best resort of the land! And you two are?”

It was Hermione who answered.

“Oh, this is Mr. Potter and I am Mrs. Potter” said Hermione in a playful tone

What the hell?

“Ah, the Potters” said Mrs. Otto “Is this your first time aboard the ‘Honeymoon Delight’?”

“Yes, and I am very, very excited!” said Hermione “Isn’t that right, honey?”

Harry looked taken aback at Hermione's sudden mood swing. Awhile ago, she looked stoic but now she seems to be back to her normal cheery self.

"Yes, my little bon-bon" said Harry in a weak voice

The lady smiled

"I'll see if there is a seat for the two of you, I'll be right back"

"What are you doing?" Harry muttered under Hermione's ear

"I am making it look natural" said Hermione "Otherwise, there will be suspicion"

"Don't tell me we are actually going to ride this thing!" said Harry almost blushing beyond reason

"Hold the phone," said Hermione "Harry, are you blushing?"

"It's the heat" said Harry, rubbing his face

Knock! Knock! Knock!

"Open up, this is the Royal Guard of Biestavale!" yelled the voice from outside

"Oh no..." Hermione said

- - -

Rapticon Sr. walked down the dark corridor with the pistol at aim. He looked behind him for any signs of the Royal Guard and fortunately, not a life in sight.

He walked a couple of steps forward and reached the end of the corridor where another corridor stretched from his left and right. Like before, not a sight of the Royal Guard.

"We'll check in here" said the voice of a guard from the right side

“Good” said another one “We have to be quick, Sir Severus Snape and the others will be arriving with reinforcements”

Rapticon Sr. took a step backward and swore under his breath. The marching boots of the guards approached towards him.

“Why do they always find me?” Rapticon Sr. muttered

The marches of the guards became louder telling the raptor how close they were. Rapticon Sr. observed the walls of the corridor and noticed pipes attached to the walls.

Those pipes on the walls might hold some steam in them...

The marchers were coming close, Rapticon Sr. could see their feeble shadows nearby.

One... Two...

The shine of guard’s helmet gave Rapticon Sr. the signal to act now.

Three!

And with one swift move, Rapticon Sr. aimed the pistol and shot the pipes behind the guards. The shooting caused the pipes to emit steam of great amount towards the guards’ faces. Rapticon Sr. walked between them and kicked them with a double split kick. He dropped on his two feet and knocked out a third one.

“Ack! Damn steam!” he said as he waved the steam away from him

Rapticon Sr. backed away and took a breather. He searched the area and to his relief, the left of the new corridor said

Docking Bay 3

“I hope they are there” said Rapticon Sr. as he ran to the bay on his two feet.

- - -

Knock! Knock! Knock!

“Open up!”

“What do we do, Harry?” Hermione said, tugging his arm “The pilot of the airship will come down any minute and open the airship! You’re done for!”

“I know, we have to think of something!” said Harry

“They won’t open up, send in the black mage!” said the guard from the outside

“Oh my” Hermione said

“What’s wrong?”

Hermione looked at Harry

“They are going to use magic to blow the ramp up! I can’t believe this!”

“Then looks like we have to do what we have to do” said Harry, drawing out his sword

Before Hermione could reply, they heard a struggle from outside. There were grunting noises, punching, kicking, slashing and the like.

“What’s going on?” Hermione said as she reached for the switch

“Don’t!” Harry said “It might be dangerous”

“We’ll just have to wait and see” said Hermione pressing the button

The ramp made a “pssst!” noise and started descending. As the ramp descended, Harry and Hermione were shock to see the sight before them.

All of the guards were knocked out including two black mages who were supposed to be blasting the doors open.

“Who could’ve done this?” Hermione looked at the out cold people

“A Dragoon” said the voice of Ron

“Ron!” Harry said “I am glad you’re alright!”

“Me too” he said with his goofy grin he always did

“But how... how did you manage to - ?”

“Beat them all?” Ron smirked “They were too distracted and I was able to attack the latter with quick Dragoon reflexes!”

“Enough with the chit chat and on with the escaping” said Hermione
“We better go to docking bay three!”

“Let’s go” said Ron “By the way, what were the two of you doing inside a honeymooner’s vessel?”

“None of your business” said Harry

Ron rolled his eyes as they entered the next docking bay which was number three. The three looked around for Rapticon Sr. but there was no sign. There were only two ships in the docking area. The first one looked like a football shape with lots of jagged sides and a propeller at the rear. The second one looked different. It was wide, had sails at the back giving the ship a bird-like look. The second ship was larger than the first one.

“We’ve got to look for Rapticon Sr.” said Harry

“But where?” Ron said as they passed the second ship

For a second there, Harry thought he heard Chocobo “kwehs”

“Psst!”

“Hermione did you say something?” Harry asked

Hermione shook her head.

“Psst! Harry, Ron, Hermione!”

Harry, Ron and Hermione looked behind them and saw Rapticon Sr. crouched below a crate.

“Professor!” Ron and Harry said in unison

“For the last time, I am not your professor in this world!” said Rapticon Sr. irritably

“Yeah, yeah” said Ron smirking “So what now?”

“We are hijacking this Chocobo transport airship. Yumi, Moco and Choco are in it already albeit undetected” said Rapticon Sr. without further ado

The three looked at Rapticon Sr. with shocked expressions.

“You can’t be –“ said Hermione but was cut off by Rapticon Sr.

“Listen princess, we’ve come this far to get our asses to safety. If we stay longer, Snape will do anything in his power to stop us from revealing the truth. Your name is valuable so anyone outside of Biestavale will listen to you and that is one of reasons why we are taking you out of here. So, hijack it or not?” Rapticon Sr. stared into Hermione’s big chocolate brown eyes.

Hermione was speechless. She looked at Harry who nodded while Ron shrugged.

“Alright, fine!” Hermione said in defeat “Just make sure you don’t hurt anyone unless it’s really needed!”

“Don’t worry” said Rapticon Sr., he checked his magazine clip for ammo check... three bullets. Rapticon Sr. reloaded it and armed the gun “Let’s go”

Raising his clubbed claw, Rapticon Sr. knocked on the hatch door with three knocks. Much to their fortunes, the ramp lowered down and they were greeted by a Moogle.

“Ello, poppet” Rapticon Sr. said and with a quick move, he whacked the Moogle square on the head with the handle of the gun.

“Oh my gosh!” Hermione squealed as she picked up the knocked out Moogle. Harry saw that it looked like a stuff animal with swirls for eyes.

Rapticon Sr. climbed up the ramp which leads him to a high-ceilinged bridge where the airship operations were held.

“Alright, folks!” Rapticon Sr. announced as he reached the landing

Harry, Ron and Hermione, who was carrying the knocked out Moogle, followed after the raptor and were amazed to see the room. It was wide, circular and had a wide window. Dozens of Moogles were there and looked horrified at Rapticon Sr. and the fact that Hermione is holding one of their friends.

“Kupo! Th-They got Mookie!” cried a fat Moogle

“He’s not dead” said Rapticon Sr. “He’s just dreaming of little old lady land – anywho, I am commandeering this vehicle for the sake of national security! – Hermione toss me the incapacitated one”

Hermione halfheartedly gave Rapticon Sr. the knocked out Moogle and showed the whole room.

“You see what I am capable of!” he said in a mad-like voice “I can be a crazy-ass bastard for all care” he tossed the knocked out Moogle to Hermione who caught it.

“You are commandeering nothing” said a voice of slick and slyness

Everyone in the cockpit looked above where a man came out of a door which leads to the interiors of the airship. He was tall, had long

dirty blonde hair which was tied to a ponytail, long bangs that arched his face and rough looking chin thanks to growing facial hair.. He had pilot goggles on his head, a dark brown jacket and tan cargo pants. Harry could guess that he is a Machina Master based on the tools that were sticking out of his many pockets. The man carried a two-barreled gun on his shoulder.

“Ah yes, and you are?” Rapticon Sr. asked in the air of a tea party host greeting his guest

“The name’s Fenrir Skylar” said the man named Fenrir, he spoke in a very heavy southern accent of the Americans “I don’t need your name, buddy because names are nothing when you got the character”

Fenrir walked down the center of the cockpit and looked at Rapticon Sr. eye-to-eye.

“Listen here, tongue-slither” said Fenrir in a serious tone “I don’t like seeing my Moogles mistreated. You are outnumbered since these Moogles can fight. They know how to use magic, weapons, skills and the like. Hell, I even got a few gunners right here!”

Fenrir then sighed in a mock manner.

“So why don’t you do everyone a favor and get the hell out of here, okay doc?”

Rapticon Sr. chuckled and looked at Fenrir.

“Son,” he said in a faint British accent as he aimed his pistol at Fenrir’s forehead at pointblank range “Learn the math, three plus two”

Cue to this, Yumi and Moco popped out of from a hatch that was behind Fenrir. Yumi took out her dagger while Moco stayed on her shoulder.

“Right no time” said Yumi with a smirk

Fenrir looked at Rapticon Sr.

“Skyld” said Rapticon Sr.

- - -

Snape walked along the corridors of BronzeWings Port furiously. He never felt so insulted in his life! How could he let three fugitives slip from his fingers! How!

“Did you find them yet, Hamilton?” Snape asked a Royal Guard

“No, sir. We have yet to check the airships since we haven’t issued a grounded travel warrant from the port’s office” said the guard named Hamilton

Vector and Relo were also having their own humiliations.

“What will Jacques say?” complained Vector “Hermione chose me to be her godfather and this is the result! Her kidnapping?”

“Don’t be too hard on yourself, Vector!” said Relo “We will find Hermione soon, you’ll see!”

“Sir, sir!” said a guard who ran inside the room “You better come up to the viewing deck!”

Snape, Vector and Relo ran up the stairs and up on the rooftop viewing deck where they saw a flying airship drifting towards the South Citizen District below.

“Dammit!” Snape swore

“Ah, Snape!” said the voice of Rapticon Sr. from the airship’s PA “I see you’re sad to see us leave! You see, we wish we could stay but after how you treated us, we can’t say anything but goodbye! We’ll take care of Hermione, my dear council members, she’s in safe hands! Just ask, Snape!”

“Get the Port’s emergency airships to pin the vessel down!” demanded Snape to a guard

“Take care!” said the voice of Harry and Ron

“Sir,” a guard approached to Snape, Relo and Vector “The emergency airships have been disabled”

Snape bowed his head down in defeat as he saw the airship fly away to a great distance. He swore and rammed his fist on the railings as the airship descended to the lower levels of the kingdom to remain on good altitude.

“Damn them! Damn them!” shouted Vector

“If we hurry, we can get the other ports to pin the ship down for landing!” said Relo

“They’d be gone by then” said Vector

“But it’s worth a try!” said Snape “I don’t care how you do it! Just do it!”

Snape glared at the airship that was drifting away from him. For once in the life of Severus Snape’s time as Royal Council member, he had not one, not two, not three, not four but five fugitives slip from his hands.

“That’s got to be the best group of fugitives I ever seen” muttered Hamilton, the guard, as he looked the airship flying above the Southern Citizen District.

They were flying on an airship... a sign of freedom... for now.

Read and Review!

Chapter Twelve

Vain Protection

“We’re still above the city” said Harry, he looked out of the window and saw the Citizen District below “Can’t this thing get any faster?”

Harry didn’t know why he asked. The airship is flying fast but the vastness of the city makes it feel like a drag to get out of it.

“It’s the fastest she can go” said Fenrir, who was on the wheel

It was Harry’s first time flying on an airship. He hasn’t quite succumbed to that fact owing to the big chase he had in the past hour but after finally seeing the view, he couldn’t help but smile.

“Wow...” Harry whispered in amazement as the ship passed by another airship

Harry couldn’t quite help but feel a sensation in his gut. He was flying on a large vessel! It’s quite different from a broom. He never flown a plane before (The Dursley’s would leave him Mrs. Figg whenever they went abroad) so the airship ride can be quite exciting. He looked below and recognizes the Greater District’s many shops and cafés, the trade market, the famous Celes Hotel at the Citizen District and his Warrior’s Guild.

My guild...

Harry frowned while he looked at the red-roofed building. He realized that after what happened, he might never see the place again... he was now a fugitive accused of kidnap and murder.

How about Moco and Yumi?

Harry looked at Moco who was looking at the other Moogles (who are in frozen panic from the recent events) from a distance. He wished he didn’t bring Moco into this. Moco had goals, dreams and a great life

as a Chocobo rancher. What would Mooka, Moco's father, think? He must be worried sick as they fly above.

Then Harry looked at Yumi, the first human being he befriended in Accula's world. She was sitting at one of the many chairs of the bridge. She was staring at the ceiling while swing her legs idly. Harry didn't know much about her but he wished Rapticon Sr. didn't bring her along... though, after what Harry thinks she feels about him, Yumi is probably half delighted that she came along.

After that theft fiasco a week ago...

Harry chuckled at their first meeting where she robbed him of his money but had a change of heart during confrontation. From then on, he is used to know that Yumi is more than just a thief.

Yumi must've felt Harry's eyes since she turned to Harry and gave a sheepish smile. Harry replied with a wave and looked out of the window.

Hermione...

His thoughts now swirled on his amnesic best friend. Hermione was looking indifferent seated on a chair a few feet from Harry. Harry could tell that she is reflecting on what is happening to her right now... how she got fooled into getting kidnapped, how she was deliberately molested by a royal subject, how she witnessed the confessions of Royal Council member, Severus Snape and a crystal of her dark past, how her Uncle Vector didn't believe her... and how she allowed herself to go along with them on this roller coaster ride.

Reflecting on about Hermione Grangeré, Harry always wondered why she ended up this way. Why is she like a developed character? Why don't Harry, Ron and Rapticon Sr. have a history or an established place in this world? He remembered Rapticon Sr. saying about them having a possible background in this world like how Hermione is a daughter of a famous general. So what is their background in this world?

Hermione's character background is somewhat a very shocking one. Remembering Moco's stories on how Summoners were extinct, he looked at Hermione and thought about what she can do. Can she actually summon a Sentinel? A super-being that can cause apocalyptic feats? For some reason, the departure of this world to the real world didn't really matter to Harry like before. What concerned him now was who exactly Hermione is and why does Snape want with her.

"Are you alright, kupo?"

Harry shot a look at Moco who approached him. Moco looked at Harry with concern. Harry smiled at the little creature and nodded.

"I'm fine, Moco" he said "I'm just tired and..."

"...shocked, kupo?" Moco asked

"Yeah," Harry said "We can say 'shocked'."

Harry sighed.

"Look, Moco" Harry knelt before the Moogles "I am sorry I got you into this –"

"Kupo!" Moco jumped to midair flight "Don't apologize, Harry! It doesn't really bother me, kupo!"

"It doesn't?" Harry looked at Moco

"Erm... not really, kupo" Moco landed on the ground "But I know you have no intention in putting me and Yumi in danger. Maybe you had no choice in taking us along, kupo? Or maybe it's because you don't want us to get hurt? I can keep guessing but always have the thought that you guys want to help us, kupo!"

Harry laughed and rubbed the Moogles on his head. He was glad that Moco was the first one he met at Atrynömunal.

“So I have decided” Moco said, putting a tiny hand on his chest “that as your Moogle friend, kupo, I will go with you wherever you please! Choco will tag along too”

“But it might be too dangerous –”

“Dangerous, kupo?” Moco crossed his arms in a cute manner “Are you conscious that my delicate look might compromise my safety!”

“Take it easy!” Harry raised his arms in defense “I didn’t mean that!”

The Moogle started laughing.

“I am just playing around, kupo!” Moco said “But if there’s one person you should be worrying about and that is...” he pointed to Hermione

Harry looked at Hermione and saw her rocking back and forth on her seat. She looked worried and lost.

“You said she’s your best friend, right?” Moco said

“Yeah” said Harry not taking his eyes off of her

“Then ignore me and be a friend for her, alright?” Moco tugged on his sleeve

Harry looked at Hermione and nodded.

“But what about that explanation I owe you and Yumi?” Harry asked

“We have a lot to worry about, kupo” Moco waved a hand “Besides, we can wait”

Harry unexpectedly pinched Moco’s fluffy ear and stood up. He walked towards Hermione. Hermione stopped her indifferent manner and made a fixed smile at Harry.

“Hi,” she said weakly

“Are you okay?” Harry said sitting beside her

“No” said Hermione not looking at Harry. She glanced at Harry and noticed his grim look and added “Sorry... I just had a rough day, that’s all”

“We all had” said Harry “Look, I am sorry I didn’t tell the truth before –”

“Save it, Harry” said Hermione “I know you had to... and frankly, I am glad you did otherwise, we’d never know what Severus Snape is up to”

Her very straight tone gave Harry the impression that she had some annoyance in her state.

“Are you... are you angry?” Harry asked

She looked at Harry with her chocolate brown eyes and looked away from him.

“I... I don’t know” she said slowly

“What?” Harry said in slight aghast

“Look, Harry” said Hermione, standing up “I know you’re nice but after what is going on I don’t know who to trust!”

“Why can’t you trust us?” Harry said standing “We saved your life twice already”

“Harry, I know what you did” Hermione said “But trust goes a long with me... I trusted you but after you had to use my trust to kidnap me, I don’t know how far you are going to go”

Harry looked at her in a hurt expression. How can she be so stupid? Shouldn’t the run from the clutches of Snape and Scipio outweigh the actions they did to her?

“Then what can I do to earn your full trust?” Harry said

“You already did” Hermione said “I just have a lot on my mind... I barely know you guys and after the assassination, it looks like I have no choice, do I?”

“B-But I thought you said a while ago you had no idea on who to trust?” said Harry

Hermione sighed

“My mind is racing, I am tired and I want to eat, Harry... I can’t think straight”

“Then answer me, as a person you just met last night, will you trust me and my companions as we go to Skyld?”

Hermione looked at Harry with a very thoughtful expression. She looked to her left and saw the pilot, Fenrir. She looked at Harry and nodded.

“Thank you” said Harry

“But one question”

“Fire away”

Hermione bit her lower lip and in quick fashion, she dragged Harry to the corner of the bridge away from earshot.

“Harry,” she said “I – I can’t help but notice how you and... Ron, right?” she looked at Ron who was aiming his spear at Fenrir

“Yes, that’s Ron” Harry said

“Okay, Ron –” Hermione continued “I can’t help but notice how you and Ron seem to... erm – know about me”

“What?” Harry looked at her

“Don’t be stupid” she spat “You two claimed that you were my best friends!”

Harry's heart leapt. He almost forgot that Hermione wasn't oblivious that there is something wrong with him and the company he has brought.

"Hermione" Harry said quickly "I – I don't know if it helps but it is true"

"Really?" Hermione put her fists on her hips "I don't really recall having two boys as best friends"

"No" Harry rubbed the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger "Hermione, it's complicated –"

"Complicated?" Hermione looked aghast "Elaborate, please"

"Erm – I don't think it is the right time to explain everything" said Harry "But here's the idea: the four of us, me, you, Ron and Rapticon Sr. don't belong here"

"I don't understand" Hermione shook her head "Don't belong here?"

"Like I said, it's not the right time" said Harry "As much as I am frustrated that you have no sense of amnesia –"

"Amnesia?" Hermione said loudly causing everyone to look at them "How dare you say that! If I recall correctly, I know perfectly what my past is and who my father is!"

Harry bowed his head down.

"This will be hard..." he muttered

"Sorry?" Hermione asked

"I said this will be difficult" said Harry "Your amnesic state will make this difficult for both of us"

"Difficult?" Hermione said hotly "I am not amnesic! I remember everything that has happened, thank you very much"

"It's not that, Hermione!" Harry said, grabbing her by the shoulders "Can't you remember anything? You are my best friend! I trusted you with my whole life! You helped me in the worst situations and I saved your life many times! Can't you remember!"

"You're hurting me!" Hermione cried

Harry released her as if she was a hot kettle. He backed away and looked at her with shock on what he did. He closed his eyes slowly and covered his face... he hoped that he would shake her out of the memory.

"What's going on here?" said the voice of Rapticon Sr.

"Nothing" Hermione said

"God, it's like back at Hogwarts" Rapticon Sr. rubbed his head "Any luck, Harry?"

Harry shook his head. He felt ashamed at hurting Hermione and didn't look at her.

"Oh..." Rapticon Sr. nodded "Anyway, we are almost over the city walls so sit tight and..." he turned to Moco "I just checked the Chocobo hatch, Choco is doing fine along with the other Chocobos"

"How many are down there?" Ron asked

"Five" said Rapticon Sr.

"Plannin' to hurt them, doc?" said Fenrir coolly

Rapticon Sr. turned to Fenrir and shook his head.

"I have no intention to hurt the birds"

"Just you wait," Fenrir chuckled "Everyone will find out where you are headed and once we reach Skyld, they will arrest you for whatever you're doing"

“We can kick their ass” said Rapticon Sr. “Look, if you want you, your Moogle friends and your Chocobos to avoid any inconsistencies then at least follow whatever we want”

“What makes you think I will listen to ya?” Fenrir glared at Rapticon Sr.

“Want to listen to a story?” Rapticon Sr. asked

“No time for your fairy tales, doc” Fenrir said

“Oh believe me, this ain’t no fairy tale” Rapticon Sr. waved his hand impatiently

The raptor walked in front of Fenrir and said

“A few hours ago, we attempted to kidnap the daughter of Jacques Grangeré” he gestured to Hermione “I think you can recognize her”

Fenrir looked at Hermione with great surprise. His solid features looked thoughtful from Hermione to Rapticon Sr.

“Go on...” Fenrir said

“As I said, we tried to kidnap her – bam! – Mission successful. On our way out we ran into the Royal Adviser of His Majesty King Bedeviere who ran away from the crime scene of the now assassinated king –“

“Hold on a sec” said Fenrir “Are you telling me Scipio killed King Bedeviere!”

“Yep” said Rapticon Sr. “This event lead to a complication since we know about it and Scipio held Hermione hostage. Severus Snape arrived, “Royal Council member Severus Snape” saw this and made a head-on confession that he orchestrated the assassination of King Bedeviere and that it was him who told Scipio to do it”

“That’s just bull –” Fenrir said but was cut off by Hermione

"It's true" Hermione said "I was there when I saw it... he told me every single detail and now he has accused my companions that they are responsible of the death of the king and my kidnap. If you are going to accuse me of lying then I ask you; why in the Sentinel's name would I lie about something so serious?"

Harry didn't know how she did it but Hermione's speaking skill caused Fenrir to look at her in shock. It felt like a well thought-out speech.

"B-But under what agenda is Severus working on?" Fenrir asked

"Someone powerful" said Rapticon Sr. "Snape used his power as Council member to arrest us but we escaped from their clutches since we have more bigger fish to fry"

"Even bigger than a conspiracy against the kingdom?" Fenrir raised an eyebrow

"We have no idea what's going on" said Rapticon Sr. "But before we get into much detail, everything hangs on the city of Skyld"

"What do you want over there?" Fenrir looked at Rapticon Sr. suspiciously

"We need to warn Archmage Accula about Severus Snape's implication in the assassination of King Bedeviere" said Harry all of a sudden.

Rapticon Sr. and Ron looked at Harry in surprise.

"How could I be so sure that you won't pull an assassination attempt on the Archmage?" Fenrir leered into Harry's eyes

"Accula is a friend of mine" said Rapticon Sr. "I have known him for years and he's the only one I can trust. He must know that Snape is working for someone that might threaten the kingdom"

Harry thought Rapticon Sr. read his mind. Harry wants to get out of the world of Atrynömunal badly as Rapticon Sr. does but after walking into the assassination of the King, Snape's confession, Hermione

being a Summoner and being accused for doing crimes, would he just walk away from that?

Because whatever it is, he is now part of it. Hermione, Ron and Rapticon Sr. are also involved since they were there when Snape told them the truth and with the scandalous nature of this information, it won't be less than sooner till Snape's superiors try to take them down.

Don't forget... Snape wants Hermione because she's a Summoner.

Hermione's past concerned Harry the most... it may be a work of fiction emulated by the F.F.O.'s magic but Harry thought that it would be best to help Hermione out of it. If she was a real Summoner, then that would mean she can be an advantage in the current war that's going on.

How about their escape to the real world?

It had to wait... Harry cursed himself for thinking that but he has made friends in this world. He grew to like the place and he couldn't help but think of leaving the place in a state where he has the choice doing something to make it better.

"Milady," said Fenrir, looking at Hermione "Do you think they are serious?"

Hermione looked into his eyes without blinking. Fenrir read her eyes and glanced at Rapticon Sr.

"You people are serious, aren't you?" he said

"We are not lying" said Ron, lowering his spear "If you thought we were then you should've turned this ship around and hand us to the authorities. But you haven't done such thing, have you?"

Ron had a point. Fenrir stared into space and reflected on what they told them.

"Let's say I believe you" he said after a moment of silence "But if you were to be caught on the way to Skyld, how will that affect me?"

“You will claim yourself a hostage of the fugitives” said Rapticon Sr. “You will say that you were threatened by the fugitives to cooperate and that if you were to do otherwise, we would use this ship as a weapon to destroy property”

“That’s bold of you, Ford” said Fenrir with a chuckle “But how will I know I have your word?”

“We will give you control of your ship again” said Rapticon Sr. “Even if trust is an issue right now, we hope you won’t turn around. It’s either you turn this ship around and allow this information to never reach the Archmage or you help us. It is entirely up to you”

The direct question to Fenrir felt very well done. Harry knew Rapticon Sr. was making Fenrir feel like he had to make a choice that if one false step is made, chaos will ensue at his expense.

“Fine,” said Fenrir “But if you screw with me then I will have to oppose”

“Fair enough” Rapticon Sr. nodded “You have my word”

“And I will know soon enough what your word is worth” said Fenrir coolly

“Um – guys?”

It was Yumi, everyone looked at Yumi who was looking outside of the bridge’s window pane.

“What’s going on, Yumi?” Ron asked

“We have a big problem heading our way” she pointed outside

- - -

“You have authorized what!” Jacques Grangeré roared

“They won’t shoot them down, Jacques!” said Diana Glacius as the two walked down the castle corridor.

Jacques Grangeré couldn’t help sit around and wait for his daughter’s safety. The moment he heard they left on airship, he left his office and went to the Situation Chambers where everyone was operating on the current situation.

“Then what are you trying to do, Diana?” he said strictly “Tell me”

“We are going to pin it down to the ground. Cripple it to put it simply but not destroy it” she said

“And if they fight back?” Jacques asked irritably “They weren’t reluctant to kill King Bedeviere and Scipio!”

“We are aware of the circumstances, Jacques” said Diana “But we can’t do anything but wait on and see what will happen”

“This better happen quick, Diana” he said and then his face became sulk “I promised Hermione I would keep her safe”

Diana bowed her head down.

“I know” she said “I love her as much as you do but what can we do? They might use her to get out of the castle since they know you would never order such an action!”

They entered the Situation Chambers where the Royal Council (sans Snape, Relo Perkins and Vector Alonzo), Royal Chief of Staff Xander Erkley, the five succeeding Generals in the chain of command, Attorney General Boris Gullivan, Royal Officer of Defense Wes Duvall, Royal Officer of Special Forces Jofer Tripp and many working officers.

“Where’s Zeiji?” Jacques asked as he walked down the large room.

“He is escorting the Emissaries of each kingdom over here just in case the fugitives try to escape towards their kingdoms” replied Diana

If there was one room that was technological advanced, that would be the Situation Chambers.

The Situation Chambers was a wide square room filled with desks and velvet furniture. The entrance of double doors would lead you to a stoop of stairs where a short hallway opened up to a very long oval table. Branching out to every side of the table were study rooms where operations would commence. At the back of the oval table was the office of the superior officer in charge of the situation. Whether it is the King or the Chief Executive General, that room was their throne. The office had a single desk, a phone (the land of Atrynömunal is entering an age where phones are becoming a medium) and a wide glass window pane that can let the occupant view the outside.

From here and there, everyone from every race would walk here and there holding documents and papers. Generals, mostly human race, sat on the oval table, viewing the Situation Chamber's screen where an airship is putting surveillance on the hijacked airship.

"The Royal Chief of Staff is here, sir" said a secretary Viera

"Thank you" said Jacques as he entered the room of the oval table
"What's the situation?"

"Sir Jacques" said a female general who had black locks for hair "We are glad you arrived. The situation is still not looking good"

"Put me up to speed" said Jacques

"The target is swerving away from the emergency airships and thing is that this airship looks like it was customized to be very fast" said the female

"Can they out maneuver it?"

"They are trying"

"Thank you, Miss Leslie" said Jacques

"Sir" bowed Leslie Murma

“Jacques” said a new arrival as he entered from one of the rooms “I think you have heard about the move on pinning down the ship?”

This man was the Royal Chief of Staff, considered to be the “second most powerful man in the kingdom”, his name is Xander Erkley. He was tall, almost bald and had a demeanor of strict authority.

“Who authorized it, sir?” asked Jacques sternly

“It’s not a sanctioned order” said Xander, sitting down at the oval table “The Council members at the field decided it”

“Who? Severus Snape?” asked Diana

“Alonzo, Perkins and Snape” Xander clarified “They thought it would be best”

“Aren’t they aware that they might endanger my daughter!” Jacques said hotly as he pointed to the screen

“We are all aware of that, Jacques” said Xander giving him a look of no concern

“I – I just can’t believe it!” Jacques rammed a fist on the table “Under our very noses! How can we allow such actions to happen!”

“It is not your fault, Jacques” said Diana “Now calm down and let’s find a way to fix this situation”

Jacques raked his brown hair and closed his eyes.

“Get everyone ready in a few minutes in the oval table, we will try to get a Machina Master to get us in contact with the fugitives” said Grangeré

Diana nodded and ordered a Royal Guard to do the announcing around the chamber.

“This has to end today” said Jacques to Diana “Because if something happens to her, I will –“

“ – never forgive yourself” Diana finished his sentence “I know... we all know what she’s been through in the past years”

“I – I just can’t believe I am making her experience this” muttered Jacques so only Diana can hear “When Danielle died... I promised to her that I will never put her into any harm again”

“Jacques... don’t be too hard on yourself. Focus on getting her back instead of focusing on sentiment!” said Diana “As much as I hate saying that, listen to me: we will get through this. Hermione will be safe”

Jacques sighed and nodded.

“Fine, fine... any word on Zeiji?”

“He has arrived with the Emissaries” said Diana

Jacques thanked Diana as Zeiji, his chief of staff entered with the Emissaries of every kingdom in Atrynömunal.

- - -

“Hold on tight!” Fenrir said as he turned tilted the airship sideways causing everyone to slide to the right.

The airship swerved away from the incoming small airships (which looked liked peanut shaped ships) and spun around from them.

“Woah!” Ron yelled as he rolled and landed on a chair

“Ahh!” Hermione screamed as she fell of her place and nearly fell on a control panel filled with knobs and buttons.

“Gotcha!” Harry said as he caught Hermione

Harry stood on his two feet as he tried to gain balance. He helped Hermione up to a seat and fastened a seatbelt on her.

“Thanks” she said quickly “How about you?”

“I’ll be fine!” Harry said

“Kupo!” Moco squeaked as he rolled the other way when Fenrir tilted the other way

“Moco!” Yumi screamed as she jumped for the tiny creature and caught it “Stay here with Hermione”

Yumi ran to Hermione and gave her Moco.

“Take care of him, okay?” Yumi said

Hermione replied with a nod. She tucked Moco under the seatbelt and held the armrests as Fenrir took another swerve to the right.

“Can’t you lose them!” Rapticon Sr. shouted as he held on a mast

“I am –“ Fenrir then turned another left “– trying!”

“Can we at least shoot them down!” Yumi yelled

“This ship is not for combat, sweet cheeks!” Fenrir yelled back

“Oho! Don’t you ‘sweet cheeks’ meeeeeeee!” Yumi said when she fell back as Fenrir made another swerve

“We can’t lose them any further!” Harry said looking out of the cockpit window.

Every Moogle in the bridge were fastened to their seats as they started squeaking their “kupos” in panic.

“Then that only means one thing” said Rapticon Sr. He looked at Fenrir “Where’s the way up the deck?”

“Are you crazy!” Fenrir said giving glances to the radar and to Rapticon Sr. “The moment you go up there the wind will scoop ya up before you could even move!”

“Then sustain a straight flight plan!” Rapticon Sr. said “Trust me, I’ll take care of it”

“I – I am coming too!” Harry said, grabbing on to the mast near Rapticon Sr.

“Me too!” said Ron

“No, Ron!” Harry said, turning to Ron “You stay here and guard Hermione!”

“Then who will watch your back!” Ron asked as he held tighter when Fenrir made another swerve.

Harry pointed to Rapticon Sr.

“Be careful then” said Ron “If we lose you then we’ll have a reason to land at the city”

Harry nodded which cued Rapticon Sr. to yell

“Sustain a straight flight, now!”

Fenrir scoffed and made a twirl. Everyone nearly rolled on their places as the airship finally went on a straight flight.

“There is a lift that leads you to the deck a few corridors down here!” said Fenrir, observing the radar “I’ll try to let ya near them as close as I can but I won’t guarantee you accurate range”

“Good, let’s go Harry” said Rapticon Sr.

Harry followed Rapticon Sr. into a threshold leading them into a narrow hallway. Harry expected to go further but Rapticon Sr. took a right. A lift waited for them as a sign saying “Lift” stood above.

“C’mon” Rapticon Sr. climbed onto the lift

Harry followed suit and with a push of the button, they ascended upwards. Harry saw a sliding door above them open up as gusts of wind and flashes of light met them.

“When you feel like falling, grab on to me!” Rapticon Sr. shouted among the gust of wind ringing in their ears “And when you’re in a jam, never fight back just retreat, okay!”

“Okay!” Harry yelled in reply

The lift finally ascended to their location.

It was a sight to behold. The towering castle of Biestavale loomed over them like a giant. The mid afternoon sun shone behind it giving the castle a shadowy look among the horizon. Harry saw below the ascending terrain level of the city as it ascended to the castle. It was almost a dream for Harry to see such a size!

“Watch out!” Rapticon Sr. pointed upward

- - -

“The airship is preparing to leave the city!” said the voice of the pilot in the radio at the Situation Chamber

“Then follow it out of the city!” demanded Xander “Just remember that we need to hit them where they are forced to land! Got it?”

“Yes, sir, copy” replied the pilot

“General Sebastian Koontz?” Diana said

“Yes, ma’am?” said a balding general around his mid-forties

“I want you to lead a band of Royal Guards to set a perimeter around the outskirts – never lose sight of the airship” she said

“You got it” said Koontz as he left the Chamber

Diana walked to Jacques and said in his ear

“I’ve sent a squad of Royal Guards to follow the airship outside of the city”

“That’s good, thank you” said Jacques distractedly as he watched the screen which broadcast the airship’s flight intently

“This is your opportunity to cripple the ship’s engine” said Xander to the radio “Remember, shoot to cripple, not to destroy”

“Yes, sir” said three voices at the same time

Jacques put his hands together and rested his chin over them. He watched the screen when three small airships started advancing forward the target.

- - -

“Here they come, Harry!” Rapticon Sr. shouted as he took out his hammer

“How can we fight them in the air with these!” Harry asked as he waved his sword

“Follow my lead” said Rapticon Sr.

An airship fighter closes in on the side of their airship. Harry could see the pilot from the outside.

Rapticon Sr. lifted his hand, aiming at the ship.

“Fire!” he yelled

A small explosion of fire emitted beside the tiny airship causing it to move away a little.

“Dammit, they’re too fast!” Rapticon Sr. said then with a look of realization he looked at Harry “Harry, prepare to follow me, okay!”

“Okay!” Harry replied

Rapticon Sr. cast another fire spell except above the tiny airship causing it to dodge below. Another fire spell and the tiny ship’s top hull were on level with theirs.

“Follow me!” Rapticon Sr. shouted

Harry looked on as Rapticon Sr. ran towards the edge of the airship

Is he crazy!

Then in a fraction of a second, Rapticon Sr. jumped off the edge and with a big relief, he landed on the tiny airship with a loud “thud”.

Harry was reluctant to follow such a stunt! He held his ground as Rapticon Sr. shimmied to the cockpit of the tiny ship.

WOOSH!

Harry fell backward as a second airship fighter flew above him. The airship was so close it could’ve knocked Harry off the deck.

“That was close” Harry said

BANG!

Harry shot a look towards Rapticon Sr. and saw him bashing the glass of the cockpit with his hammer. Rapticon Sr. was holding on to a ledge of the ship’s structure as he smashed the cockpit with his hammer.

- - -

“Sir, sir! One of the fugitives is hijacking my ship!” yelled the radio

“Really? How did he do that!” said Leopold Bialystock, one of the generals

“He must’ve jumped” said Maximillian Bloom another general “They are trained professionals!”

“Shake him off!” yelled Olaf, who has arrived at the oval table from his office

“I – I can’t, sir!” said the pilot in a panicked voice “He must’ve disabled my rudder!”

Everyone nearly flinched as they heard a loud crack of glass and the whizzing of wind from the radio.

“Argh! Mayday, mayday! – ksssshhhhh - !”

The radio then went dead.

“Um, sirs, you have to look at this” said Zeiji Hildasan looking at the screen

- - -

Rapticon Sr., sitting on the top of the cockpit’s broken glass, grabbed the wheel and swerved it around the course of flight. He looked below as Fenrir’s airship went into blur. He looked below and saw the knocked out pilot.

Rapticon Sr. then twisted the wheel to make it fly left away from Fenrir’s airship and towards the castle. He then put the wheel on hold to let it sustain straight flight.

“Here ya go!” Rapticon Sr. said as he carried the pilot out of his seat. Rapticon Sr. looked inside the cockpit and saw a bag... it looked like a parachute.

Rapticon Sr. took the parachute bag and made the pilot wear it. Then holding up the pilot, he knocked his helmet.

“Wake up!”

The pilot’s eyes opened suddenly and gasped at Rapticon Sr.

“Have a nice flight!” said the raptor as he pulled the parachute’s string causing the chute to open up forcing the pilot to glide away.

With the pilot gone and safe, Rapticon Sr. went to the cockpit and controlled it towards the airship.

Meanwhile, Harry dodged a couple of zooming airship fighters.

Where is Rapticon Sr.?

Before he could survey the area...

Ziiinnnngg!

Harry looked up. What was that?

To his surprise, a small flying object circled the airship. Harry squinted at it and saw black lenses.

Is that a surveillance device?

Harry remembered Yumi telling him about the kingdom’s airborne cameras that captures every event such as this one. Whatever he is doing, they can see him.

- - -

“Isn’t that the boy who is under your guild, Olaf?” Xander gave Olaf a derided look “The one who you said was your best?”

“Y-Yes, he is the one” said Olaf, he bowed his head “I can’t believe he put himself up to this...”

“Don’t worry,” said Xander “Your blunder won’t even get to the news”

Olaf glared at Xander as the Chief of Staff surveyed the screen which was now showing the Ibarra war hero Harry Potter.

- - -

“Argh!” Harry ducked as one of the airships flew by him

Harry stood up with the help of his sword. He went to full height and glared at the upcoming ship. It was at this moment Harry felt like he knew what to do.

The airship is coming right at me... it's leveled to a point where I can hop on like Rapticon Sr.! But how can I get to it?

Harry stared at his sword.

Bingo!

Feeling the same strange confidence that he felt back at Ibarra against the Behemoth, Harry bent his knees as the airship approached closer.

Come on... a little closer...

The airship was already a few feet.

Closer...

It was about to knock Harry off!

NOW!

Harry raised his sword and with a strong thrust forward, his sword caught the strong metallic hull of the ship. Harry expected it to scoop him up off the deck but there was no dragging motion... no feet hanging on midair.

The sword just kept slashing the airship's hull as the ship flew above Harry a few feet above him. Harry looked up as he saw sparks and metal flying while his sword cut the hull.

How am I doing this?

The airship flew away from Fenrir's airship as Harry dropped his sword to the ground. He saw his sword glowing orange, he could tell it was hot after it's friction against the opposing ship's metal.

Harry looked behind him and saw the airship fighter emitting black smoke as it started making a very heavy "wooning" sound. To Harry's surprise, the airship fighter turned around and started heading towards Harry again. Harry prepared his sword for another slash but the airship's cockpit opened up. The pilot jumped out of it and parachuted himself to safety.

H – He aimed the crashing ship at us!

Harry retreated for the lift but he knew that it would be too late. Pretty soon, he could see himself falling down to the city below...

WOOSH!

Harry ducked out of instinct as another wooshing sound rang his ears. Harry inspected the skies and saw a broken airship fighter zoomed towards the crashing airship. To his amazement, the broken airship fighter's cockpit opened and an orange raptor jumped out of it and landed on the deck of Fenrir's airship.

"Duck!" Rapticon Sr. shouted as he ducked

Harry closed his eyes as the two airship fighters rammed at each other causing a large explosion.

BOOM!

"Argh!" Harry yelled as the airship tilted a bit from the shock

Harry started rolling sideways towards the edge, he tried to grab something but nothing was there but smooth metal.

"AAH!" Harry gasped as he fell off the edge

He prepared for a freefall to death, he expected winds to howl into his ear, or maybe feel his body getting whipped by the gust of wind.

But none of that came.

Harry saw that he was hanging by the edge. He looked up and saw that Rapticon Sr. and – unexpectedly – Hermione were holding his hand.

“We’ve got you, Harry!” Hermione yelled through the wind

“Pull!” Rapticon Sr. demanded

The two pulled Harry up to safety. Harry calmed himself down as he started taking deep breaths.

“What are you doing up here!” Harry asked Hermione loudly

“I – I wanted to help!” Hermione replied back

“But what can you do!” Harry asked

“If you paid attention, Harry, you must know that I just saved your life!” Hermione said in a bossy tone.

“But it is not safe up here!” Harry cut the air “Get back to the lift now!”

“Don’t tell me what to do, Harry!” Hermione argued

“WOULD YOU TWO MOTHER – “ a passing trade airship passed by making a loud horn blocking Rapticon Sr’s words “ – STOP ARGUING!”

Realizing what’s going on, the three stood up and surveyed the area. There was one airship fighter left but where was it?

- - -

“DAMMIT!” Xander rammed a fist on the table “How did he do that!”

“We can still catch them, sir!” said Leon Chappelle, another of the five Generals present “We have one more airship”

“Then take it down!” said Xander “Use the black magic missile if you have to!”

“But what about Hermione Grangeré?” muttered Chappelle

Xander looked beyond and saw Jacques talking to Diana Glacius.

“Shoot it down with the airship fighter’s missile. Tell the pilot I said so” said Xander “We can’t pin them down anymore, they’re too dangerous! They will kill the girl anyway if we don’t catch them!”

“Sir, I disagree!” said Chappelle “What would Jacques do if he finds out?”

“He won’t” said Xander “I trust that you won’t tell, right?”

Chappelle looked at Xander in shock. Since when did the Chief of Staff acted so irrational?

“He would be crushed”

“Just do it, that’s an order” said Xander “We have to take it down!”

Xander is acting funny lately...

Chappelle shook his head.

“Sorry, sir but I can’t do that”

Xander nodded thoughtfully.

“Then I want you to gather up the five generals and discuss what to do. Now” said Xander in a dismissive way

“Y-Yes, sir” said Chappelle and with turn of the heel, he left to do his duty

Xander looked around and saw that everyone was busy to notice him. He picked up the radio near him and said

“Bomb A-One, do you copy?” Xander talked

“This is Bomb A-One, over” replied the pilot

“I have orders from General Grangeré to shoot the airship down with the black magic missile”

“The BM missile, sir?”

“You heard me,” said Xander “Use it now, take it down. Those are your orders. Follow them”

“Copy that, sir”

- - -

“There it is!” Hermione pointed

Harry and Rapticon Sr. followed her gaze and saw the last airship. It flew in a normal fashion as it lowered speed.

“It’s withdrawing?” Harry said happily “I think they are withdrawing!”

“D-Did we win?” Hermione asked weakly

The airship fighter sustains speed a few feet away from the large airship. Rapticon Sr. observed it suspiciously.

“Something’s wrong” said Rapticon Sr.

“What?” Harry and Hermione said in unison looking back

“It’s not withdrawing” said Rapticon Sr.

The airship fighter’s lower hull opened and with the blink of an eye, a long black entity emitted from the small airship’s hull.

Holy crap!

“It’s shooting a missile at us!” Rapticon Sr. yelled

“WHAT!” Harry and Hermione turned to Rapticon Sr.

- - -

Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep!...

“What’s that?” Yumi asked Fenrir, as she walked towards the wheel

“We got ourselves a missile!” Fenrir said in panic “They shot us!”

“What!” Yumi’s eyes widened “B-But why would they do that! They know Hermione is on board!”

“They probably found her expendable, freckles” said Fenrir as he took the wheel

“Oh my Merlin” Ron gasped “Harry, Hermione and Rapticon Sr.! They are still up there!”

“Can you dodge it, kupo?” Moco asked from his seat

“I can, just hold on to your seat ‘cause this will be a bumpy ride!”

- - -

“What happened!” Jacques yelled as he went inside the oval table room

“The airship shot a missile at the airship!” Zeiji announced in alarm

“IT SHOT A WHAT!” roared Jacques

“NO!” Diana and Olaf gasped

The screen showed a missile zooming towards the ship. The airship swerved away from the missile as the missile followed it.

“Who put the order! WHO?” Olaf demanded

The chamber was in panicked chaos as everyone started talking and moving around. Chappelle gave a very suspicious glance towards Xander Erkley, who replied with a leering stare.

- - -

“HARRY!” Hermione squealed as the ship made a surprise swerve to the right forcing her to roll to the right

“Hermione!” Harry called out as he grabbed her by the hand. Harry held onto one of the ship’s sail frames. Hermione pulled herself up and held one of the frames.

“This can’t be good!” Rapticon Sr. yelled as the ship took a dive below the city

Harry held on tight as the ship made a forty-five degree dive, he could almost smell the city’s market from up here.

“IS IT STILL FOLLOWING US!” Hermione yelled

“YES!” Rapticon Sr. replied, looking up

“I CAN’T BELIEVE THEY SHOT US!” Hermione cried “I CAN’T BELIEVE IT!”

Harry closed his eyes tightly as he felt the wind whip his face violently.

His stomach made a belly flop as the ship made a sudden pull upward. Harry opened his eyes and saw the airship was gliding along the Citizen District.

“Oh my gosh” Hermione gasped “We’re way too close below!”

Harry looked beyond, he could tell they were thirty feet above ground zero. What was Fenrir thinking?

“He’s avoiding the missile!” Rapticon Sr. yelled against the wind

The ship made an ascending motion as it raise itself to the skies. Harry could feel the sun burning his face as the ship circled around the castle.

“The missile won’t give in!” Harry yelled

“We’ve sustained straight flight!” Rapticon Sr. released his grasp from the frames “Let’s use this to our advantage!”

“How!” Harry asked as he got out of the frames

Rapticon Sr. pointed behind Harry, Harry looked behind and saw Hermione.

What did he mean by that?

Then Harry remembered the Ochu incident...

Oh...

“What?” Hermione asked in a worried tone

“Hermione,” Rapticon Sr. walked towards her “Honey, if it is too much to ask –“

“What is it that you want?” Hermione asked, glancing at the missile that was chasing them

“We need you to cast ‘Protect’ around the ship, the missile will catch us up at any moment and we need you to –“

“No!” Hermione cried “I – I can’t do it! It’s too big! I – I know I did it against that Ochu but that was small and I don’t even think I can do it again – I just can’t! I am not qualified yet!”

Harry felt sorry for her, she looked panicked and she was looking red all over.

“Hermione, we need you to do this!” Rapticon Sr. said “Please! Just try!”

“But I can’t!” Hermione said

“You have to!” Rapticon Sr. said “Because WE ARE GOING TO DIE!”

“I know that!” Hermione said in a very high voice “But I can’t do it, I just can’t!”

“Then at least try, Hermione!” it was Harry who yelled this time.

Hermione looked at Harry. Harry felt a bit taken aback at the tears that were rolling down her cheeks. They were asking her too much.

“Harry...” Hermione shook her head “You know I can’t do it...”

“The missile is closing in on us” said Rapticon Sr. “We can avoid MASSIVE DAMAGE if you cast ‘Protect’!”

“I don’t have the power to do it!” Hermione said

“You’re a Summoner for Christ’s sake!” Rapticon Sr. said in frustration

“DON’T CALL ME THAT... EVER!” Hermione screamed as she went to full height

“THEN DO IT SO I CAN CALL YOU A WHITE MAGE!” Rapticon Sr. answered back “Please, Hermione! You want to die and never find out what your fate is in life? Be my damn guest!”

The words seem to strike Hermione. Harry saw her gulp a huge amount of air. She walked at the center of the deck and took a deep breath.

“If – I – If I fall” she stuttered “Catch me, o-okay?” she looked at Harry and Rapticon Sr. “And don’t try to stop me if I ask you to”

“We will” said Harry

Hermione closed her eyes and lifted her arms to the sky. The same whitish glow emitted around her body. Harry saw a faint hexagonal-shaped barrier emitting around them.

“Is it working?” Harry looked in awe

“I – I can’t do it!” Hermione cried as she lowered her arms

“Hermione, do it!” Rapticon Sr. said as he climbed up the sail’s frames and looked behind them “The missile is closing in!”

The ship made a swerve to the right. Harry was prepared to catch Hermione but she was unusually still while she was raising her arms as she glowed brighter.

The airship ascended higher as the missile followed. The missile was so fast it was already ten feet from them.

“Hermione, we need that shield right now!” Rapticon Sr. yelled from above

“Rrghhh.....!” Hermione groaned, as she closed her eyes tightly. Harry could see she was sweating a waterfall

A barrier of hexagonal shapes started materializing but would disappear. Harry quietly cheered on for Hermione as she started whimpering.

C’mon, Hermione... you can do it...

“Six feet!” Rapticon Sr. yelled

Meanwhile, below the bridge.

“What was that!” Fenrir pointed outside the bridge window. Yumi saw hexagonal-shapes emitting and disappearing.

“I...” Yumi looked in awe “don’t know –“

“It’s Hermione!” Ron said “She’s casting Protect on the whole ship!”

“But she’s not doing a good job, is she now?” Fenrir said coolly

“The missile is closing in!” Yumi looked at the radar

“Try to get out of the city” said Ron “So if we get hit, we can crash land to a wide open field”

“Ron’s right” said Yumi “C’mon, dude!”

“I’ll try” said Fenrir

Back to the top...

“HERMIONE, TRY HARDER!” Harry yelled

Hermione was now making sniffing noises. It looked like she was in the middle of sobbing. Harry could see her face, it looked like she was in pure agony while she tried to cast the spell. She was sweating, her eyes were shut tightly, she was breathing rapidly and her white glow was growing stronger.

“THREE FEET!” Rapticon Sr. yelled

- - -

“The missile is going to hit them!” Zeiji said

Everyone in the Situation Chamber watched silently as the airborne camera captured the missile chasing the ship, they could see a strong white glow on the ship’s deck.

“What’s that glow?” Norman Quagmire, one of the Royal Council, asked

“I don’t know” said Diana

Jacques’ heart was now racing. He can’t just sit here and watch his daughter die in front of his eyes. He felt like shaking but he froze on his seat.

- - -

“HERMIONE!” Rapticon Sr. yelled

“I CAN’T DO IT!” Hermione yelled in the midst of crying “IT HURTS, OH PLEASE STOP!”

Harry couldn’t take it anymore, Hermione was now crying in agony and excruciating pain but her hands were still high up in the air and the white glow was strong than ever.

“STOP IT, STOP IT! PLEASE MAKE IT STOP, HARRY!” Hermione screamed

“TWO FEET!”

This was it.

Harry ran for her, he wanted to stop the pain. She was pushing herself too much.

But before he could grab her, Hermione made a bloodcurdling scream as the white glow around her died away. A feeble half barrier of hexagonal shapes materialized behind them.

“ARGH!” Rapticon Sr. yelled as he jumped down the deck and grabbed Harry and the unconscious Hermione.

The missile closed in on the hexagonal barrier and...

- - -

BOOM!

Everyone in the Situation Chamber flinched as the explosion in the screen caused the airship to produce heavy damage.

Everyone saw the airship flying upwards with its flaming tail behind it. The airship gave out another explosion from the rear causing it to fly

beyond the walls of the kingdom. As the whole aircraft was out of sight, everyone gave a sudden gasp as another big explosion erupted from behind the walls.

“NOOO!” Jacques cried as he collapsed onto his seat, everyone near him helped him up as he started sobbing tears of sorrow “Hermione!” he cried

Everyone bowed their heads down in guilt of their failure... the great general was sobbing without shame! He cried out his daughter's name as Diana placed a comforting hand on his shoulder.

“My daughter is lost!” he said in a mad-like voice

“I don't think so, sir!” Leslie Murma pointed to the screen “Look!”

The airborne camera followed the airship out of the city. Everyone looked on and saw that the big explosion came from the ship's gas tank that fell from the ship itself. The camera looked up and to everyone's amazement the airship was gliding to crash landing northwest looking badly damaged. Flames were still erupting from its rear.

“I WANT A ROYAL GUARD TROOP OUT THERE RIGHT NOW!” Jacques shouted “Find her and bring her right here to safety, I don't care what you do with the fugitives, I just want my daughter back, now!”

“Yes, sir!” everyone said as the whole room buzzed into action

Jacques sat on his seat and cried tears of joy.

- - -

“UP! UP! UP!” Yumi yelled as she helped Fenrir pull the wheel towards them “DAMMIT!”

“We ain't gonna make it for a clear field, red!” Fenrir said to Ron

“AARRH!” Ron yelled as he held onto a mast

All the Moogles in the bridge squealed as the sound of a crashing plane rang into their ears. The light of the sun was now moving fast inside the airship's bridge due to their spinning.

"HOLD ON TIGHT, FELLAS!" Fenrir yelled

The ship did a very long and violent barrel roll as it flew over the lake that rested below the plateau of the city. The ship flew beyond the lake and over a mass land of dense forest.

"PROFESSOR!" Harry screamed as he hugged the unconscious Hermione around the waist so tight with his right arm while he held the frames of the burning sails with his other.

"HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU?" Rapticon Sr. yelled as the ship continued spinning "I AM NOT YOUR PROFESSOR IN THIS GOD FORSAKEN – !"

Before Rapticon Sr. could even finish the ship finally made a very violent landing as it crashed through a dense area of trees. Harry held on to Hermione as the airship crashed through the trees causing branches, twigs and small trunks to fly around.

"AHHH!" Rapticon Sr. yelled

The airship made a violent shake and with a sudden halt, it bumped to an enormous boulder. The shock of the impact caused Harry to fly from his place, his grasp to Hermione let go as she flew elsewhere.

"No!" Harry screamed but before he knew it, he knocked himself face first on a solid rock wall. He fell to the muddy ground of the dark forest and with brief glance of the place, he fell out of consciousness and into darkness.

Chapter Thirteen

Moredread Mire

Hiding.

It felt like an hour.

“Harry!”

His back ached as if someone cast him a Cruciatic Curse.

“Harry, please wake up!”

Then his head started to throb wildly... he held his cranium and felt a solid bump.

“Dammit Harry!”

Harry let out a gasp as he felt the speaker’s two fists ram down his chest.

“OUCH!” Harry said as he opened his eyes to meet the flaming red hair of Ron.

“Blimey, you’re alive!” Ron said

Harry could barely see, everything was a blur to him.

“R-Ron?” Harry croaked

“Don’t worry, mate,” said Ron “I got your glasses right here”

Harry saw the figure of Ron hold up his glasses. Harry picked them up and placed it on the bridge of his nose.

The sight before him was disastrous. A few feet afar the airship they rode on was flaming heatedly. Harry could feel the hot fumes press against his face as he sweated with dirt and blood.

“Where are the others?” Harry asked quickly

“I really don’t know” said Ron, looking around “The moment we crashed I flew out of the bridge’s window and – well, you know how the ship’s got those sails – I landed with fewer wounds. Then I saw you and revived you. Glad your glasses aren’t broken though, consider yourself lucky”

Yeah, lucky... me, Rapticon Sr. and Hermione –

Hermione.

“Oh no - !” Harry gasped as he turned behind him. The dark murky forest extended before him. Where was Hermione?

“What is it?” Ron followed Harry’s gaze puzzlingly.

“Hermione!” Harry shot a look at Ron “W-Where’s Hermione?!”

“Harry, calm down –“

“How can I calm down?!” Harry exclaimed “Where’s Rapticon Sr.?”

Ron wasn’t able to answer due to the airship’s burning sail collapsing causing loud crashes.

“Where is he, Ron?” Harry asked

“I didn’t see him” said Ron “Look, Harry, I know this is hard for us to cope with but I need you to help me find the others”

“I will,” said Harry, standing up “Argh!” he cried as he collapsed to the ground while holding his back.

“You okay, mate?” Ron looked at Harry with concern

Harry couldn’t lie. The pain on his back is excruciating enough to send a single Death Eater in glee. He turned his back to Ron who gave out a gasp.

“W-What?” Harry panicked “What is it?”

“Y-You got a piece of metal sticking out on the side” Ron said hoarsely

“It’s a good thing it didn’t cut through his spinal cord!” shouted a voice from afar

Harry and Ron turned and saw Rapticon Sr. albeit in torn clothes and a bloodied face. He limped towards them with a wooden piece of stick that served as a cane.

“Sir!” Ron sighed “What happened?”

“I flew of and landed down a plantation of huge ass thorny branches – ack! –“ he winced as he pulled out thorn with a size of a syringe from his side “ – ugh, that’s gonna hurt all day”

“Will you be alright?” Harry asked while breathing deeply

“Yes, I will be fine” Rapticon Sr. nodded “But first, we need to get that piece of shrapnel of your back”

Harry hesitated at first but after a few glances from Ron, he agreed and positioned himself for Rapticon Sr. to pull.

“Now, now...” Rapticon Sr. bent lower and lifted the cloth of Harry’s casual clothes (Harry realized he’s been wearing clothes on the occasion of having lunch with Hermione) “This won’t hurt a bit...”

“Really?” Harry asked desperately

“No – it will hurt a lot” Rapticon Sr. nodded

“Sounds great” Harry said in sarcasm

“Ready?”

“Just do it” Harry said

With a quick slide, Rapticon Sr. held the metal piece and pulled it out of Harry causing him to shout in pain.

“Relax!” Rapticon Sr. said as he dressed the wound with a large kerchief from his pocket “There... much better than last time, eh?”

Harry took deep breaths as the pain slowly ebbed away. He gave double takes on his dressed wound but would feel sick at seeing it.

“Now what?” Harry asked

“We dunno” Rapticon Sr. looked at Ron “Got Potion?”

“No” Ron shook his head

“We need to find Hermione” Harry said “She flew from my grasp the moment we crashed”

I hope she’s alive and well.

Before Rapticon Sr. could reply to Harry, the sound of thunderous knocking and shouting rang their ears. The three looked around and they heard the sound coming from the airship.

“Oh my god,” said Rapticon Sr.

Rapticon Sr. limped across the large amounts of debris. Ron followed suit with Harry on tail with his hand on the wound.

“Fenrir?!” Rapticon Sr. shouted “Yumi!? Moco!”

“HELP!!” yelled Yumi’s voice which came with a cough afterwards

“How did you get out Ron?” Rapticon Sr. asked, looking for a possible exit

“I – I don’t really recall but I remembered flying out of a window” Ron replied

“Dammit, I bet the crash blocked it out” Rapticon Sr. said “Stand back”

Harry and Ron backed away and saw Rapticon Sr. lifting his arm to shoulder height.

“Sir,” Ron interrupted “I – I think you’re not strong enough –“

“I’m fine, Ron” said the raptor, looking at him kindly “Just be ready if I faint”

Ron and Harry exchanged looks of uncertainty.

“I am forty-five years old, Ron but I am strong as your age” said Rapticon Sr.

Without further ado, Rapticon Sr. launched a fireball from his hand to the airship. The blast caused a large burning hole to emit on the ship’s hull.

“Yumi!” Harry yelled the moment the fire’s lessened “Moco!”

At this moment, a jet of water shot out of the hole.

“Woah!” Ron dodged

Fenrir, all sooty and bruised, ran out carrying Yumi with his left arm and Moco at the other. He ran and fell to his knees in front of Ron and Harry.

“You okay?” Rapticon Sr. went to Fenrir “Here... looks like one of my potion bottles survived”

Rapticon Sr. opened the bottle and poured the contents to Fenrir. Like before, green light escaped from the bottle and surrounded Fenrir’s body as it healed him.

“T-Thanks...” Fenrir croaked with a cough “M-My Moogles and Chocobos –“

“We’ll get them,” said Ron “C’mon, Harry!”

Ron pulled Harry by the shoulder and led him into the inside of the airship. Harry entered the ship to see everything almost set aflame. Smoke clouded the whole bridge as he heard coughing and lots of “kupos”.

“Dammit!” Ron coughed “The smoke is too much!”

“Do something about it!” Harry said covering his face with his arm

“Got it, got it –“ Ron said, taking his spear out

Harry crouched lower and saw Ron raising his spear to the air. The dragoon spun his spear around as if it was a propeller. The smoke around them started turning wildly.

“Direct to the exit!” Harry yelled

Ron nodded and directed his propelling spear to the hole. The next thing they know, the smoke was almost gone.

“Dragoon ability?”

“Yep,” Ron said “Where are the Moogles?”

Cue to Ron’s words, a small group of Moogles peeked from the bottom of the bridge’s cockpit controls. They looked around and started mumbling in a panicky way.

“Easy there,” Ron said, going towards them “Fenrir is safe”

“H-How about the Chocobos, kupo?” asked a fat Moogle “The fire might get to them!”

“Where are they held?” Harry asked

“At the b-back hatch, kupo” said the fat Moogle

“Right,” said Harry with a nod “How can I get there?”

“There’s a path from the bridge and into the back deck from here, kupo” one of the Moogles pointed to a door that was smoky “But it might be too dangerous!”

“Is there another way?”

The ceiling started making loud cracking sounds.

“Harry, we better go!” Ron said

“Is there another way, tell me!” Harry yelled

“Kupo! You can access the hatch from the outside, kupo!” a Moogle with a mage hat jumped “That’s how we load the Chocobos inside, kupo. If we can get it to open, we can still save them!”

Crack!!

“Harry, watch out!” Ron ducked

Harry looked behind him and saw the ceiling falling causing more smoke to enter.

“Out, now!” Harry yelled “Don’t look back, just run to the hole!”

Ron took three of Moogles with his arms and ran for the hole with Harry behind him carrying two. The other four Moogles were in front of them running towards their exit.

“We better get out before the furnace in the cockpit gets destroyed, kupo!” yelled a Machina Master Moogle

“Harry!!!” Ron yelled

At this point, they exited out of the airship as bursts of fire exploded right behind them. Everyone jumped out of the hole and landed on the ground outside.

“Harry! You okay?!” Rapticon Sr. bent towards Harry

Harry, who was lying on the ground, nodded feebly.

“Sir, the Chocobos are at the loading hatch at the back of the cockpit” said Ron, standing up “One of the Moogles said so. We think –“ he panted “We think we can get them out from there”

“Fenrir,” Rapticon Sr. turned to Fenrir “Lead us to it”

Fenrir, with his hand grasping the gash at his arm, nodded.

“How ‘bout your friends, doc?” he asked, gesturing to Yumi and Moco

“Tell your Moogles to drag them far away from the airship just incase it explodes or something” said Rapticon Sr. “Quick, Choco is in there too”

“Let’s go!” Ron said

Harry, Ron, Rapticon Sr. and Fenrir moved around the airship. Harry looked above and saw the sky having a tint of pale orange. It must be nearing twilight.

“It’s somewhere around here,” Fenrir pointed to the distance “We’re not too far”

They rounded around the large flaming airship. Harry noticed that the airship crashed into a nearby clearing which was at the south side from where he was standing.

Where are you, Hermione?

The party finally arrived at the rear of the airship where strong flames blazed the sails above.

“Is that it?” Ron pointed at the ship’s rear. A rectangular shape on the hull gave an obvious impression that that was a hatch.

“Yes,” said Fenrir “You think they’re gone?” he gave a slight anxious look to Rapticon Sr.

“Your Chocobos are fine” said Rapticon Sr. “I read the schematics of your ship a week ago –“

“When are you going to tell us that you were planning this whole operation a week ago?” Ron asked indignantly

“Not now, Ron” Rapticon Sr. distractedly said “Anyway, the compartment where your Chocobos are has a hull that can protect them from anything, right?”

“Yeah, but the crash must’ve damaged them” said Fenrir

“Yeah,” said Rapticon Sr. “Let’s open it”

Fenrir walked up to the side of the rear while strafing from the debris on the ground. Harry looked up to watch for the falling sails.

“Those burning sails might fall...” Ron pointed out

Fenrir went to the side of the hatch door and pulled a lever that blended with the hull. Harry jumped at the loud creaking sound that the hatch made as it lowered itself down.

“Uh.. guys?” Ron looked up “The sails are breaking down reaalllyyy slowly”

“Better make a run for it when the birds fly out” Rapticon Sr. muttered

From the sails that were now breaking up, Harry checked the hatch door. The hatch lowered itself down to the ground. Harry peered among the smoke that was emitting around the outside and could see glints of yellow.

“Well?” Harry called

Fenrir walked inside the hatch and saw five of them curled up at the corner looking a bit shaken and frail.

“C’mere fellas” said Fenrir kindly “You’ll all be okay”

To Harry's amazement, the five Chocobos stood up from their positions and slowly walked out of the hatch and into the light. Harry sighed in relief when he saw Choco's green scarf among the yellow feathers. Choco was still alive.

"They're all well, doc!" Fenrir gladly announced as he lead the flock towards them "They're just spooked!"

"That's good to here – "

BSSSH!!

"HOLY MOTHER OF ULTIMA!!" Ron yelled

Everyone looked up and saw the sails' frames gave in. Harry took a step back as the flaming waves of cloth and wood fell towards them.

"KEEP THEM OUT NOW!!!" Rapticon Sr. yelled

Fenrir nodded and led the panicked Chocobos away but one of the Chocobos started to flap its wings out of panic.

"Woah there, lil fella!" Fenrir started restraining it with his arms

"Argh, Harry!" Ron chocked out of fear

Harry thought of running but the falling debris was very close now. He might not make it.

Here it comes...

Harry closed his eyes tightly. He stood his ground ready to face the endless pain that will take place in a few seconds... every burn, splinter or gash, he's ready for it.

BANG! BANG!

Harry nearly let out a yelp at the sound of falling debris crashing above him.

Above him?

Harry opened his eyes. He let out a gasp at the sight before him.

“A... barrier?” Rapticon Sr. gasped

Harry, Ron, Rapticon Sr., Fenrir and the Chocobos were surrounded by a dome-shaped barrier with hexagonal shapes.

“Son of a bitch,” swore Fenrir “Who did this?”

He looked at Rapticon Sr. who shrugged then to Ron who did the same and to Harry giving the same reply.

“Well?” Fenrir asked

Feeling like someone was there, Harry turned to his back and was shocked to see the last thing he ever thought of seeing.

It was Hermione.

“Hermione!!” Harry yelled

Everyone’s attention focused to Harry’s direction.

“H-Hermione?!” Ron said

Hermione looked like the crash destroyed her image. She was bleeding too much from her waist, she had a bloody forehead, her hair was filled with twigs and leaves, her lower face was smudged with earth and scratches. Her white blouse was already sporting red spots from blood, brown gashes from the wet dirt.

She held her hand up real high while casting the protect spell. Like on the airship deck, she was breathing heavily and she was twitching around constantly.

“Hermione, STOP!” Harry yelled “You’ll get weaker!”

She must've listened to him since she lowered her hand. The shield around them dispersed giving them way to run for her. Harry ran towards her as Hermione fell on her knees then to on her belly. She lost consciousness.

"Hermione! Hermione!" Harry yelled, crouching over her "Hermione? Are you okay?"

He held her around his arms and started prodding her awake.

"W-What happened?" Ron asked "

"Hermione just saved our lives" said Rapticon Sr. "Before the missile hit us, Hermione cast a protect spell around the ship, she wasn't on time though but the damage was minimal. Due to the potent of the spell, Hermione has lost too much of her energy"

"So why was she able to do it now?"

"Experience," said Rapticon Sr. "She must've learned a thing or two when we told her to do the spells"

"Hermione..." Harry whispered "I – I am so sorry," he pulled her into a tight hug

"Harry, we better get her into medication" said Ron "Do you still have a bottle of Potion left?"

"No," said Rapticon Sr. "But if the fire dies down, we can salvage the ship for any items"

"I got some tufts of red wings down at my satchet bags right here" said Fenrir "We can use them to revive your friends"

"H-How about Hermione?" Harry asked shakily "It's my fault she's like this!"

"She'll be fine," Rapticon Sr. held Harry's shoulder with concern "Just take her to the Moogles. Ron, Fenrir and I will sort the Chocobos out and when that's done, we'll figure out on what to do"

Harry hesitated and looked at Hermione. He pulled her into another hug and sighed.

"Everything's going to be okay, Hermy" he said

Hermione didn't reply anything but a weak moan.

- - -

Faraway from our heroes, the Grand Gate was in a stir. Every kiosk owner, shopper and lingering citizen of Biestavale looked on in wonder as a troupe of Royal Guards marched out of the Grand Gate and into the plains below.

"Where are the Chocobos?" asked Vector Alonzo as he surveyed the squad assembling below.

"Felipe is bringing them right now, sir" said Hamilton "And Sir Severus Snape is coming with the search squad."

"Severus is coming?" Vector raised his eyebrow

"Yes, sir... I expected you know that" said Hamilton

Vector nodded and dismissed Hamilton. The Council member went down the ramp and into the grassy plains where all of the guards are assembling.

"Severus?" Vector called to the black coated figure of Snape

Snape turned to Vector and told a Royal Guard to leave.

"What is it?" he asked

"I hear you're coming with the squad to detain the fugitives and rescue Jacques' daughter" said Vector

"You heard it right," Snape said with ease "Is there a problem?"

“Well,” Vector cleared his throat “Based on the feed projection of the crash, the airship fell to the dreaded forest of Moredread Mire”

“I am aware of that, Vector, I was there” Snape said coldly

“Then you are very well aware that Moredread Mire is known to be dangerous –“

“Vector, I have lived in this glorious city for more than a decade.” Snape snapped “I know very well what lies within the bowels of Moredread Mire. Inside the forest is a place where the non-living act as if they breathe, they take life away from the moment you disturb its soils. I am aware that I am entering a dangerous place and yes, I know what is at stake here, Vector, so don’t say anything more than you know.”

Snape breathed after his long speech. Vector looked at him in slight awe.

“Take her back, Severus” said Vector seriously “We don’t know how much damage she has taken when the airship crashed –“ Vector nearly gulped “just expect the worse for her.”

Snape nodded. He looked behind Vector and saw a Royal Guard leading a flock of Chocobos down the plane.

“Looks like I have to go now,” said Snape “I’ll be back when we are done. Make sure things are safe here”

“I will, Severus” said Vector “May the Sentinels light your path.”

Snape’s lip curled and hopped on the nearest Chocobo. Taking the reins, he spun the Chocobo towards the troupe.

“Our targets are three fugitives identified as Harry Potter, Ronald Weasley and Rapticon Sr. Raptor!” he announced to the throng “We believe they have more unknown accomplices so best be careful! Our main concern is their capture and the recovery of Milady Hermione Grangeré who is at their malicious mercy.”

Snape looked at the setting sun as the twin moons started rising above them. He closed his eyes as he felt the smooth breeze massaging his face.

He must get to them before they could ruin everything.

“Let’s move out!” called Hamilton, the Royal Guard Captain

With a “wark!” from Hamilton’s and Snape’s Chocobos, the band of troops ran to the east of Vector’s position. They were to cross a bridge over the bay and into the long plains which lead to Moredread Mire. It would take time to travel across the vast land.

Vector looked on while praying that his niece would be safe.

- - -

It’s been an hour since the incident. The fires have died and everything started turning dark despite the fact that it was only five in the afternoon. The forest trees blocked most of the light above that Harry could only see the dancing pyres of remnant flames and the four torches that are now erected around him.

“Harry?”

Harry looked up and saw Ron smirking at him with his hand held up. A loaf of bread lay on his open hand.

“Thanks,” said Harry, taking it from Ron

After the incident with the burning sails, Ron, Fenrir, Rapticon Sr. and the now revived Yumi and Moco along with other Moogles did a tedious job of putting out the fire of the then burning airship. Harry, in the other hand, held Hermione and pulled her away from the wreckage.

After the fires were put out, everyone ventured to the nearby clearing beyond the crash site. There they have set up camp with the surviving tents and used any salvage from the wreckage to their advantage. Fenrir and Rapticon Sr. searched the airship for anything

useful while Ron and the band of Moogles set up a perimeter around the camp.

Yumi, exhausted from the firefighting, fell into slumber on what's left of the burning sails. Moco gave Harry the last tent out of the five that survived. He reckoned that Hermione needed it.

Harry squinted through the darkness. The four torches weren't really helping him look around. The only thing visible was the two dancing flames at the distance which belonged to Rapticon Sr. and Fenrir's torches. But the tiny flames were able to give Harry the outline of the location they were at.

It was a near-dead forest. Harry looked behind and saw the nearest dead tree. It's gray, brittle leaves hung on the branches as the cold breeze rippled the horizon. Harry shivered at the cold and the eeriness of the place. He looked through the small openings of the branches and saw the dark sky. He couldn't help but feel like he was being watched. He turned around and saw the darkness before him... what could lie beyond the light?

"Mmm..." moaned a weak voice behind him

Harry nearly jumped. He turned behind him and was relieved to learn that it was Hermione stirring in her sleep inside the tent. Taking a deep breath, Harry wiped the sweat from his forehead and observed Hermione's sleeping state.

Harry reminded himself of what he forced her to do on the airship hours ago. He couldn't believe she was able to cast a barrier in the nick of time but with such a price. He winced at thought of her screaming woes during the casting of the spell. She lost consciousness afterwards so Harry had to hold her during the crash. After the crash, she did another barrier to save their life while she was bleeding to death.

Why her?

He remembered dragging her away from the wreckage. He was able to stop the bleeding from her waist with ripped cloth from his clothing.

He cleaned her face with water after the fire died but to no avail, she didn't regain her consciousness.

"How is she?" Ron asked, sitting down beside Harry

"She's fine," said Harry "Rapticon Sr. was able to find a couple of Potions to ease the wounds..." he bent his head lower "I can't believe it –"

"Don't push yourself to hard, mate" said Ron, frowning "We crashed, there was nothing else you can do to prevent Hermione from getting those wounds!"

"But I forced her to place the barrier around us, Ron!" Harry said, looking at Ron "I – I saw her face, she was in pain. I didn't like it!"

"Harry, calm down," said Ron "Just let it go, she's fine and safe now"

Harry and Ron looked at Hermione's tent. She slept peacefully but her clothes were still bloody and dirty but her hair was twig-less.

"Ron," said Harry "Let's promise ourselves that we will never put Hermione into any danger, ever"

"Sure, sure but we can't guarantee that, right?" said Ron

"..." Harry brooded

Before Harry could speak, Rapticon Sr. and Fenrir came back with sacks.

"Good news," said Rapticon Sr. "We found the stash of items"

At this news, everyone whooped in glee.

"But remember that we should ration this for our survival," said Fenrir "From what I know, we are at Moredread Mire."

The name of that Fenrir uttered caused the Moogles to go into unrest including Moco.

“Yes,” said Fenrir darkly, ignoring the Moogles that started hiding in their tents “There is no forest as dark and dirty as Moredread Mire in the Eastern Continent”

“What’s so bad about this place?” Ron asked as if he was in History of Magic class while looking around the area

“Very bad, kupo” shivered Moco, as he crawled under his sheets inside his tent beside the fire

“Moco’s shivering,” Harry pointed out as he went to his furry friend “What’s wrong?”

“It’s considered a taboo for Moogles, kupo” Moco said as he stuck his head out of the sheets of his sleeping bag “To be in the bowels of Moredread Mire!”

“What is in this place that scares you?” Ron asked

As if everything was scripted, everyone fell silent, waiting for Moco’s answer. Only the sound of fire crackling could be heard.

“M-Moredread Mire, kupo” stuttered Moco “is said to be the home of one of the darkest creatures in the Eastern Continent, kupo”

“What are the darkest creatures of the Eastern Continent?” Harry looked at Moco

Moco then stared into the dark parts of the forest.

“T-they walkabout within the shades of the trees, kupo... they are the forgotten ones” he gulped “In Atrynömunal-basic, we call them ‘the mist-stalkers’”

“Mist-stalkers?” Ron raised an eyebrow

It was Fenrir who answered this time.

“They are the residence who resides in Moredread Mire. They are created by the malice and corruption of their inner-being. Banished to these lands, they toiled and strived to live but adapting to the environment forced them to mutate –“

“They were once human?”

“Yep,” said Fenrir “But no one knows a man or woman who went bad in Moredread Mire who was from Biestavale” he crouched as he drew circles in the ground “Meaning, as the coming of age came to be, we all knew they were there. Origin stories? Fables. Heh, I’d be a loony to find out where they came from”

He continued before Ron could interrupt.

“They are called Mist-stalkers for one spine tingling thing.” He faced the crowd “You gotta listen to me carefully, boys and you gotta make sure this piece of information is seared into your brains...” he sighed “Whenever a mist-stalker comes close, you start to feel that prickling feeling down your neck or your spine. You start to feel cold but have this sweaty sensation in your hands. Any fire you posses start to make a strange flicker as if it’s a light bulb that needs fixin”

Harry could’ve swore, he saw one of the torches making weird dance motions near the entrance of the clearing that lead to the crashed airship.

“...mist also starts crawling on the ground like a snake,” Fenrir continued “If you’re lucky, you will probably catch moving shadows around you (it could be them or just hallucinations), sometimes, their shadows can travel out of their own beings and find themselves within the light we stay at and...” he made a thoughtful nod “...you can hear them whisper around you...”

“W-whisper?” Ron looked a bit cowardly

“Inaudible whispers,” Fenrir rubbed his chin “When you see any of those signs, you better get prepared, they’re tough. They also make this cry that the pitch of it can make your hairs stand on end”

“You can fight them?” Harry didn’t like the feeling of immortal beings at the moment

“Yes, like every other beast in Moredread Mire,” said Fenrir “But be warned, they fight in packs and since they are human, they can be tough. Their whispering means that there is more than one and that they are like ‘making their battle plans in the field’”

Harry shivered. He looked behind him and wondered if there was a mist-stalker behind the trees.

“Do they fear anything?” Ron asked

“Fire, kupo” said Moco “B-but that doesn’t mean they won’t stop catching you, kupo! Sure, fire keeps them away but when they find a way to get around that, considers yourself sorry, kupo!”

“So as long as we keep the torches up, we’ll be okay?” Rapticon Sr. asked

“It seems so,” said Fenrir

“We just need our guard up to its highest, right?” Rapticon Sr. added grimly

“Bingo, doc” Fenrir made a toothless grin

“What do they look like? The mist-stalkers?” Harry asked

“Apart from having the form of a human (or hume in alternate Atrynömunal-basic),” Fenrir said “They look deformed... they are pale, their legs are too skinny that looks disproportioned from their body, their flesh looks like flaps giving this disgusting look and they lack a face”

“Lack a face?”

“It means they have no eyes, eyebrows, lips, etcetera... except their face still has the shape of a hume face... just don’t expect the usual suspects”

Harry imagined a modified Inferus with very tall legs.

“So,” Rapticon Sr. rubbed his hands together “Who needs Ether?”

- - -

Harry walked to the tent of Hermione and checked her. She was still fast asleep.

You’re still safe...

“H-Harry?” she squeaked

Harry smiled and walked inside the tent, he sat beside her and stroke her hair.

“Harry?” she asked weakly

“Shhh... I’m here,” Harry said

“Where are we?” she turned her head with her eyes closed

“Moredread Mire,” Harry said “We crashed after we got hit.... You did great” he added

Hermione opened her eyes and Harry was startled to see her eyes bloodshot.

“I – I am so s-sorry” she stuttered while stifling a sob “If I only tried harder – “

“Hermione, it’s not your fault!” Harry said crawling to her so his eyes were leveled to her “You did great, you saved us all...” he smiled “I was the one who forced you do it... I am sorry”

Hermione blinked and smiled warmly.

“I’m glad you’re here...” she held his cheek

Harry couldn't help but hold her hand... he suddenly realized what was going on and backed away.

"Er... Rapticon Sr. and Fenrir are sorting out things in the camp"
Harry thumbed outside

Hermione stood to a sitting position and looked at her clothes.

"I hope we have clothes," she frowned "Harry?"

"Yeah?"

"Did you say we were at Moredread Mire?"

"Yes... I think you know what we are in for"

"Haha, yes..." she looked at her feet "I know exactly what we are in for"

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine" Hermione said "I just need a little more rest"

Harry nodded and left the tent. He saw Ron patrolling the area, ever since of Fenrir's story on mist-stalkers, he's been keen to patrol the camp. Rapticon Sr. and Fenrir continued salvaging the airship while the Moogles fixed the camp up. Yumi sat beside the newly made campfire and kept herself warm. Moco stood by looking at the starry sky with his blanket over his head. Choco slept behind him.

"How's Hermione?" Rapticon Sr. asked as he entered the camp with a blackened box.

"She's fine," Harry said "In fact, she just woke up"

"That's great" Rapticon Sr. said as he placed the box on a stack of items "Did she say anything?"

"Nothing much... except that she knows what she got herself into and that she can handle it."

“Poor thing,” Rapticon Sr. said as he wiped his forehead “If only we knew what was going on with Snape then maybe, just maybe, we could’ve took a different approach”

“Yeah...” Harry said “Say, do you have clothes in there?” Harry looked at Rapticon Sr.

“Eh?”

“Hermione...” Harry gestured to her tent “...has nothing to wear that can be called ‘casual’”

“Oh yeah,” Rapticon Sr. nodded “Never fear, Fenrir’s got a trunk filled with clothes. Hermione can just – er – shop around” he smirked.

The focus of character shifts to Rapticon Sr. as he goes to the dark clearing where

Fenrir is searching the wreckage for anything useful.

“Found anything?” Rapticon Sr. called

“Apart from mounds of charred debris and a headache, nothin’” said Fenrir as he tossed a plate of metal to the side

“Okay,” Rapticon Sr. nodded “I’ll check around here,”

Rapticon Sr. crouches before a chunk of burned metal and lifts it with his two claws. He looks under and sees nothing but dead grass.

“So, doc” said Fenrir “You’re going to tell me why you look like a bangaa when you aren’t?”

Rapticon Sr. dropped the debris and chuckled.

“I ain’t no bangaa... how could you tell?”

“You got no ears and you’re lacking the bangaa charm” Fenrir grinned “Are you part of the Order of the Phoenix?”

Rapticon Sr.'s heart raced... Order of the Phoenix?

"Did you say Order of the Phoenix?" Rapticon SR. asked

"Yeah, they're the Holy Knight Order of Atrynömuna!" Fenrir looked at him wonderingly "You got their emblem around your neck, don't ya?"

Rapticon Sr. looked at his pendant. Ever since he landed at the place he always thought that this pendant of a phoenix was part of the garb he was in at the beginning. Since then, he's been wearing it no matter what.

"This?"

"Yeah," said Fenrir "I know for a fact that every Order member holds one... unless you burgled it, haha"

"I didn't" said Rapticon Sr. "I just found it" he lied

"I'll take your word that you found it" said Fenrir "But to add on what I said, the Order is headed by –"

"Albus Dumbledore" said Rapticon Sr. knowing the obvious

"You know your history." said Fenrir as he pulled a long piece of metal out of the ground "The White Mage Council is a branch of the Order, if you were an Order member, I bet they'd sack you on the spot for what happened"

Rapticon Sr. didn't take a word Fenrir said, he was staring at his pendant with a new light... remembering his own words, could this be his purpose in this world? A member of the Order of the Phoenix? Could Dumbledore be right here, right now?

But why him? Why was Rapticon Sr. part of the Order?

I'm a professor at Hogwarts.

The thought could be sensible... why else would McGonagall be part of the White Council, a branch of the Order as Fenrir said? How about Snape? Was he too a member of the Order? If he was, then he has betrayed the Order by plotting the murder of King Bedeviere.

Wow, that's too much of thinking right there.

Rapticon Sr. shook his head and looked at the sky.

"You alright?" asked Fenrir from the back "It's like you saw a ghost"

"I'm fine," said Rapticon Sr. "Where's the Order's current location?"

"Ha, they got no location," said Fenrir "Only Order members know that, that's for sure"

"Dammit," Rapticon Sr. swore

He thought visiting them would help a lot on their quest to get out of F.F.O. just incase Accula is incapable to send them out of the book.

But why am I assuming?

Maybe it's because he really, really wants to get the hell out of here.

"Hey," said Fenrir "For what it's worth, I can probably pull a few strings and help ya find the Order"

"For what its worth?" Rapticon Sr. chuckled "Is it that or you wanna tag along for the ride?"

"The ride?" Fenrir raised an eyebrow "To Skyld? Well, I got no ship anymore because of you."

"Yeah, yeah" Rapticon Sr. waved an arm "So, do you know where the Order of the Phoenix is?"

Fenrir made a dry laugh.

“Everything hangs on Skyld,” he said “Just like you told me hours ago when you hijacked my ship”

What Fenrir said made Rapticon Sr. think that he won't tell him what he knows until he goes to Skyld.

“So you're coming with us to Skyld?”

“Yep,”

“You got it all figured out, do ya?”

“What can I say?” said Fenrir “Live the life, plan on-the-spot”

Fenrir then picked up a strange looking hammer from the ground. The hammer was identical in size like Rapticon Sr.'s except the head was larger and slicker. The handle was carved wood with very curvy designs.

“Tell you what,” he said as he looked at the hammer “You guys seem to not know your way to Skyld without an airship”

“Deduction.” Rapticon Sr. nodded

“Yep,” said Fenrir smirking “But anyway, I do know my way around the world with all the travelin'. So here's the deal, I'll take you Skyld through the nearby town's taxi-ships”

“Town?” Rapticon Sr. asked

“The ‘Edge of the Kingdom’ Town of Manem,” said Fenrir “It's the closest town from Moredread. It has a taxi-ship service that can take us to Skyld safely”

He then tossed the hammer to Rapticon Sr. who caught it.

“I'll help you get to Skyld only if you pay back the damages to my ship. You get ten percent of the loot we have salvaged and you keep that hammer for free”

“This?” Rapticon Sr. looked at it

“Freckles over there,” he pointed to Ron at the distance “told me about your hammer skills. I think this will do well for ya”

“Thanks,” Rapticon Sr. said, pulling his old hammer from its holster and tossing it to the ground “Does it have a name?”

“The Long Con,” said Fenrir “I bought it off a merchant at the western lands who, luckily, didn’t con me off the deal”

“The Long Con...” Rapticon Sr. stared at it, and after a nod he slid it to the holster belt like a sword “You have a deal.”

“Well, there ya go” said Fenrir as he shook Rapticon Sr.’s hand with a smirk. “Care to tell me how you guys get your weapons out of thin air?”

“I’m sorry?”

“Out of thin air, ya know, I saw carrot-top drew out his spear out of nowhere.” Elaborated Fenrir mimicking Ron’s position when he holds a spear

“Ahhh, that” Rapticon Sr. chuckled “Well, it’s one of the basic things we learned in the guilds. Every guild must teach their guild members how to summon their weapon in thin air... it’s kind of like a magic thing but not necessarily... but there you go”

“I see...” said Fenrir and started to change the subject “Anyway, so if whatever you said was true,” Fenrir continued “What will you say to the Archmage?”

Rapticon Sr. really never thought of what he was going to explain to Accula when they get to Skyld.

“Probably tell him the truth” said Rapticon Sr.

“And if he doesn’t believe you?”

“He will... I know he will” Rapticon Sr. said quietly. “I just hope that – “

Rapticon Sr. and Fenrir stopped their actions. They heard a rustle in the bushes.

“Ya heard that, doc?” Fenrir asked as he looked behind

Rapticon Sr. surveyed the area... there was nothing but darkness... the two went closer towards the edge and raised their torches to extend the line of sight. Fenrir saw nothing. Rapticon Sr. felt an odd feeling in his stomach as it lurched. The prickling feeling on his neck began to commence oddly.

“Did you feel that?” Fenrir said in a dead tone “It’s getting cold.” Fenrir said quietly.

It was awfully quiet and the coldness was getting obvious for them. Rapticon Sr. then saw the fire on his torch flickering oddly. Fenrir and Rapticon Sr. looked at it with dread etched in their faces.

“Oh my god.” Rapticon Sr. whispered

Meanwhile, Ron checked on Harry who was standing before the tent of Hermione, which was closed.

“She’s changing,” Harry said “We finally got new clothes for her.” He nodded “Got anything?”

“I was able to scrounge up potions and helpful stuff for us,” Ron said as he handed Harry green potion bottles and tufts of phoenix downs. “It will surely come in handy.”

Harry took the items from Ron and placed them in a bag which he got among the salvaged.

“Any progress with Hermione?” Ron asked

“Nothing much...” said Harry “Why aren’t you trying to talk her anyway?”

“Me?” Ron said as he sat beside Harry “I reckon she’d be back soon... I just know it. I can feel it. I really don’t make a deal out of it anymore because I believe she’ll be fine because she’s with us”

At this point, Harry understood what Ron meant... then why is he worrying so much? Hermione was with them... is it because she’s a Summoner?

“We still owe Yumi and Moco an explanation” said Harry trying to change the subject “We can’t leave them out of the dark too much.”

“You’re right, I find it surprising they’ll stick with us even if we don’t spill... nice choice for friends, though” he smirked at Harry

Harry chuckled. He decided to check on Hermione when he felt an odd prickle down his neck...

“Blimey...” Ron gasped softly

“What’s wrong?” Harry asked as he saw Ron’s face which looked oddly pale

Ron pointed to a nearby torch. Harry’s heart started to have an unusual pace when he saw the torch flickering strangely. Gusts of wind raked the trees above and the clearing around them. Harry and Ron turned around to see the darkness beyond the trees.

Ron gulped.

“Harry?” he said in a dry voice “I – I think something’s wrong.”

Cue to what Ron said, Rapticon Sr. and Fenrir approached them from the crashed airship. Ron and Harry spotted their alertness in walking making them stand up. Harry saw their faces which looked as pale as Ron’s.

“Y-You saw the signs too, d-d-didn’t you?” Ron said worriedly

Rapticon Sr. nodded and looked around the area again. The dead silence of the clearing was enough to make them be on their guard.

“The silence worries me...” said Rapticon Sr.

Everyone jumped a bit when the torches around the camp started flickering quietly in an odd way. The eeriness brought a shiver down Harry’s spine. The Moogles and Moco also woke up from their slumber due to the sudden change of temperature. The Chocobos squawked uneasily. Yumi also woke from her sleep and started feeling cold.

“W-w-what’s going on?” Yumi said as she crawled out of her tent. She rubbed her elbows as she shivered “It’s so c-c-c-cold...”

The whole camp started to verify the odd flickering of the torches. Harry saw the face of Moco. Moco knew well what the flickering meant.

“Mist-stalkers,” said Fenrir quietly as he saw the dancing flames flicker wildly “they know we’re here now.”

The sound of a loud croaking sound from afar made everyone jump and turn on their heels.

“What was that?” Ron said in a high pitch voice

Fenrir exchanged the torch to his other hand and listened to the loud croaking sound. The sound then made a large thud on the ground. Harry noticed Fenrir’s horrified face.

“What’s wrong?” Harry asked

“The mist-stalkers brought its head honcho... I tell ya, you wouldn’t want to mess with him.”

“T-Then what are we waiting for?” said Yumi in panic “Let’s go!”

“Round up the Chocobos,” said Rapticon Sr. to Yumi and Moco “Take whatever you can carry, we move now”

In a few minutes, the camp was now roving about, packing everything they can carry.

“Carry what you can” said Fenrir as he picked up his rifle from the corner and looked around beyond the trees “We don’t need that much stuff.”

“Kupo, I’m scared!” cried the fat Moogle

“Shhhh... don’t worry, little fella” said Yumi as she carried the chubby Moogle “you’re going to be alright, okay?”

The flickering of the torches started to grow wildly as wisps of mist crept from the darkness. They were coming closer now.

“Quick, everyone!” Fenrir called out

“We can take this way,” said Rapticon Sr. as he directed the torch to an open path that lead to the darkness of the mire

“Quick, Hermione” Harry said as he helped her up “Happy with new clothes?”

Hermione nodded weakly. She was wearing a white robe with majestic designs around the back.

“I need a bath, though” she replied

Harry helped her up towards Choco who gladly accepted in carrying Hermione. Moco fluttered towards Hermione and checked if she was okay.

Fenrir surveyed what was left of the camp... tents, a few trunks, some torn clothes and a dying campfire. He could hear the sound of the loud footsteps approaching very slowly. Mist started to crawl from the darkness where the crashed airship was.

All the Chocobos carried their stuff on saddlebags. Fenrir will take the lead on a Chocobo, while Rapticon Sr. took point from their back, Ron and Yumi would ride separate Chocobos each and Harry will ride

with Hermione on Choco with Moco. The rest of the Moogles would ride along the rest. The convoy was ready.

“Grab a torch, fellas” said Fenrir as he pulled a torch from the ground and passed it to the party “We need it. It’ll be our signal and our protection from the mist-stalkers.” He surveyed the mist crawling across the ground “Dammit, it’ll only be a matter of time till –”

Everyone ceased their doings as the place started echoing with very haunting and eerie sounds that rang into Harry and everyone’s ears. The sounds of soft but sustaining whispers echoed through the dead of night. They were inaudible but that fact alone made the hairs of the back of Harry’s head stand up on end. He never felt so horrified in his life.

“We better leave now!” Fenrir yelled as he mounted his Chocobo. Everyone followed suit. Harry mounted on Choco with Hermione sitting in front of him. Moco sat in front of Yumi while the other Moogles would stay in the saddlebags of the Chocobos for safety.

Fenrir’s Chocobo then lead the pack as the fires on the torches started flickering very wildly and the whispers grew louder.

“Harry...” Hermione moaned in fear as she started shivering.

“It’s okay, Hermione” Harry said kindly as he sat behind Hermione on Choco while holding the reigns. “It’s going to be fine.”

“Anything from behind!?” Fenrir called from the front

“Nothing but mist!” Rapticon Sr. called out “They are probably gaining on us!”

“Oh my gosh, look!” Yumi screeched as she pointed towards the sea of light their torches were lighting.

Everyone looked down and saw lonely shadows of people walking across the ground. No one was there but the fact their shadows can travel out of their bodies and into the light was enough for them to keep going.

“Dammit are these things creepy!” Rapticon Sr. said as he looked back and got his new hammer out.

With Fenrir on the front, Ron on second, Hermione and Harry at center, Moco and Yumi behind them and Rapticon Sr. taking the tail, the party sped fast with their hearts racing. Any time now, the mist-stalkers will come up and without a doubt a fight will ensue.

“I saw a shadow over there, kupo!” Moco screeched as he sat in front of Hermione

“Shhh!” said Fenrir “Just calm down!”

The Chocobo party came to a halt when they reached a clearing with a dark lake in it. Fenrir didn’t hesitate since the whispering was still ringing in their ears. It wasn’t as loud as before but the whispers presence still indicated that the mist-stalkers were still there.

“Quick, over here” said Fenrir as they galloped towards a narrow path that had the smell of rotten vegetables. “If only we can find a way to get outta here...”

Harry looked at the back of Hermione’s hood which was pulled up over her head. The fear of bringing her back to danger grew inside him as the feeling of the mist-stalkers approaching overwhelmed him. If they were to fight one of the darkest creatures in the land, then how can he assure that Hermione will be safe? He couldn’t help but hope for a miracle.

“The whispers are getting stronger!” Yumi called from behind

“I know, dammit!” Fenrir said in a panicky voice

It happened again, the shadows of the mist-stalkers started dancing in the flickering lights from their torch.

“Dammit, they’re here...” said Rapticon Sr. “I can’t see them!”

“They’re not near us yet but they’re closer!” Fenrir shouted as the Chocobos ran down a slope of the dark forest.

Harry felt his heart racing as the mist started to grow thicker, he felt a strong prickle down his neck and downward his spine. He urged the Chocobo to move forward as the whispers started to grow stronger.

“ACK!” Fenrir gasped as the group suddenly entered a foggy area of mist. The Chocobos started to “kweh” wildly as they moved on about blindly. Harry pulled Choco backward to ease him but it was getting spooked.

“What now?!” Yumi yelled as the whispers were loud enough for them to hear “They’re probably closing in on us!!”

Harry could hear the sound of high pitch wails from afar. If only he could see through the foggy mist, he can make out the mist-stalkers’ distance.

I can’t see through this fog... if only I can blow it away –

Harry thought of an idea.

“Ron!” Harry said “Blow the fog away!”

Ron from behind replied with a nod and took out his spear. He lifted it and started spinning the spear like a propeller and the weapon glowed bright blue as the fog started dispersing to another direction.

The fact that they got their vision back didn’t change the fact that the whispers were still abound. Harry looked through the back and felt his spine tingle when he saw a group of dark figures skulking towards them.

“No need to check them out, we have to go now!” Fenrir said as he urged his Chocobo to move forward to the new path which made them go uphill. Rays of moonlight filtered through the trees giving them the sense that the hill was above the level of trees.

A boulder at the side of the uphill path urged Rapticon Sr. to stop. Harry noticed this and turned back towards him.

“Where are you going?!” Yumi cried as she saw Harry passed her to the back

“Keep going!” Harry called out

Harry directed Choco towards Rapticon Sr. who has dismounted himself of his Chocobo. Harry looked on as Rapticon Sr. brought out his hammer and bashed the boulder in front of him. Harry moved Choco to give him a good view down the hill, he saw nothing but moving figures skulking up the hill with mist smoking around them. Harry knew what Rapticon Sr. was doing.

“Sir! I’ll help you there!” Harry said as he positioned Choco in front of the boulder. He remembered Moco telling Harry that Chocobos have strong legs, strong enough to knock down most heavy objects. It was at this time for Harry to see that feat.

“Choco, just give it a little kick, okay? Hermione, stay put.”

“Kweh!” Choco squawked

Harry held an arm around Hermione while Choco jumped and kicked the boulder and instantly landing on its two feet with ease.

BSH! BSH! BSH!

“Nice one, Harry!” Rapticon Sr. panted, looking down at the boulder rolling down the path “That’ll stall them, c’mon!”

Rapticon Sr. mounted his Chocobo and the two went up the hill.

“Wow...” Harry gasped as he slowed down his Chocobo.

Harry was met with a sight. The hill must be one of the tallest in Moredread Mire. Before him was the starry cloudless sky, the trees that stretched to the distance. Mountains towered in the far lands where clouds rung around them.

And towering before Harry miles away from him was the plateau where the Kingdom of Biestavale stood. He frowned at the sight of the damaged castle.

I wonder what's happening right now...

"HARRY!"

Harry snapped out of his reverie, he almost forgot he was running for his life. Rapticon Sr. was already going downhill when he called him.

Harry urged Choco to move down the hill, Harry noticed Hermione was too groggy and weak to talk. He checked if she was okay but her eyes were half-open... she must be too tired to register what ever is happening.

"Harry?! Where are you?" Ron called from below

"We are right here!" Rapticon Sr. replied. They saw the three other Chocobos waiting for them on the base of the hill. Ron looked horrified.

"We thought you were goners!" Fenrir said "What slowed you down?"
"We dropped a boulder on the upcoming fiends," said Harry "It worked."

"That won't stop them," Fenrir said worriedly "If we hurry, we can go to the edge of the forest and towards the town of Manem, it ain't far from Moredread."

"Harry, is Hermione alright?" Ron looked at her

"She's fine," said Harry, checking on her "She's just tired... we better get her to a town and fast!"

The sounds of whispers came from the uphill.

"They went pass the boulder," said Rapticon Sr. "Let's move!"

“Why won’t we fight them?” Yumi asked as they galloped across the edge of a murky swamp.

“Have you noticed what we are going through?” Fenrir scoffed “I don’t think so, freckles. We’d be ripped apart! I suggest we run.”

“Can you stop calling me ‘freckles’?!” Yumi cried as she followed Fenrir

“Why not? Your nose is filled with ‘em” Fenrir replied slyly

Yumi blushed and held her nose. Moco kupoed and chuckled.

“You like him, don’t you?” Moco said

“What?” Yumi blurted out

Moco just laughed as they ran down a winding trail. Harry was worried that they might bump into more mist-stalkers but it seems that they attracted everyone to their site giving them an easy breeze through the mire.

“Is it strange that the place isn’t as dangerous as we thought it would be?” Rapticon Sr. said a few minutes later when the Chocobos were just trotting down a muddy slope. The whispers disappeared mysteriously for over a minute that they decided to catch a breather.

“I’m not sure,” said Fenrir “I’ve never been here before...”

“Do you think it has something to do with Hermione being a Summoner?” Ron whispered to Harry

Harry forgot about how it was only him, Ron and Rapticon Sr. knew about Hermione’s true identity. He looked at Moco and Yumi... they deserved an explanation.

I’ll tell them when we get out of here.

The dark silence was only disturbed by the walking of the Chocobos and the clanking of their saddlebags.

"The mist-stalkers are far from us," said Fenrir "We should set up camp at the edge of the forest where it is safe."

"That's not a good idea," said the small voice of Hermione.

Everyone was surprised at Hermione's response. Harry checked on her. She lifted her head and stretched her arms.

"Are you alright, Milady?" Fenrir asked her in an unusually polite tone

"I – I'm fine... Fenrir, right?" she asked

Fenrir nodded and smiled.

"Thank you," she said weakly "For helping us..." she smiled

Harry wondered why she's using all her strength just to say this but whatever the case may be, she lived in a world of royalty and politics. It must be courtesy for her to thank the people who aided her.

"Well you are welcome, milady" smirked Fenrir

"Just call me Hermione" Hermione smiled sheepishly "Anyway, I don't think camping on the edge of the forest is a good idea."

"Why so, kupo?" Moco asked

"For obvious reasons, the kingdom will be searching this place." Hermione continued "Going by the edge will be a bad hiding place since they can see you from there..."

"How are you so sure about the kingdom searching this place?" Harry ask

"It is usual procedure according to the handbooks," Hermione looked flushed a bit "I – I reckon my father will order an act to find the remains of the airship and... me."

Harry noticed Hermione's sad face. He realized that she left her father without saying goodbye. He felt another pang of guilt in his gut.

"So what do you suggest we do, doc?" Fenrir said in an airy voice towards Rapticon Sr.

Rapticon Sr. rubbed his chin. He started wondering if it was wise to camp tonight or go on the dark forest until they reach Manem.

"It's either we camp here tonight and burden ourselves with the task of switching campsites whenever a mist-stalker is near or we can go on through the night looking a way out of here."

Rapticon Sr. said this quite fast. Harry wasn't quite sure if he knew what he wanted.

"I'll go for plan B," said Yumi "I rather find the way out of here than relax in a place like this."

"Me too," said Ron

"Got no choice, do I?" Fenrir said confirming his choice for the plan B.

"What Ron said," Harry replied.

"Good," Rapticon Sr. nodded "Let's go then... where to now?"

"Manem is northwest from Moredread Mire" Yumi explained "Do we have any landmarks to tell which way is north?"

"Over there," Harry said pointing to his right "I'm pretty sure of it since when I went up the hill back there," he gestured to the narrow path behind them "Biestavale was visible before me. Biestavale is south of the mire so there you go."

"Nice deduction, Harry" said Rapticon Sr. "I think I saw a few –"

To their surprise, the torches started flickering. Whispers exploded everywhere around them... a cold sensation crawled up their spines as mist started to rise up.

“Mist-walkers! Dammit! Run!” Fenrir called as they rushed towards the direction Harry pointed. They didn’t care if there was an obstacle, as long as they can escape the mist-walkers, they will be safe.

“Harry!” Hermione squeaked “Be careful!” as they followed Ron’s tail

Harry looked behind him and saw Fenrir aiming his gun at the back and firing shots.

He can see them now?

Harry thought it was stupid that he wanted to see what a mist-stalker looks like but the tension building up in him forced him otherwise. Rapticon Sr. lead the way as the Chocobos went straight inside a dark cave.

“I can’t see forward!” said Rapticon Sr. lifting his torch higher

“They’re gaining on us!” Fenrir said as the Chocobos started slowing down due to the muddy grounds

“!!!!!”

The bloodcurdling scream made the hair on the back of Harry’s head stand up. He turned around and saw the mouth of the cave being breached.

BANG!

Fenrir took aim and took a shot. The darkness was hard to aim through but Harry was glad that he was taking targets one-by-one.

The Chocobos found their feet on stone ground and started to gallop across the caves. The screams of the mist-stalkers echoed through the halls as if they were in front of them.

The party ran to a point in the cave where it had the shape of a dome. It was a clearing. The ceiling was high and the large area was branched by two more paths.

“Think we should split?” Ron said as everyone searched the area

“No, I say we take this way!” Fenrir said as he urged his Chocobo to move at the right path.

Fenrir was moving when suddenly, fogs of mist started entering the vicinity through the pathway before him.

“Dammit!” Fenrir swore.

The party was about to go to the other path but the shadows of the mist-stalkers made them stand back.

“That’s it, we’re done for!” Ron said

“No we are not!” Rapticon Sr. yelled as he drew out his hammer “Arm yourselves!”

Harry drew out his sword and went into battle position on Choco. The five Chocobos backed against each other giving them cover on all sides.

“Here they come,” said Fenrir, aiming his rifle at the entrance.

And to Harry’s horror, the mist-stalkers image was something Harry has never seen in his life. Standing a good six feet, the skinny legs of the mist-stalker look disproportioned from its body. Its white flesh that looked like flaps hung from its exoskeleton gave the creature a sickening look. The face was nothing but emptiness. The mist-stalkers started walking towards them as they skulked disturbingly.

“Oh my gosh,” Yumi said as she started shivering “W-What are we going to do now?”

“The only thing we can do,” said Fenrir

“Kick ass” said Fenrir and Rapticon Sr. at the same time.

Cue to this, Fenrir and Rapticon Sr. jumped out of their Chocobos and started engaging battle with the army of mist-stalkers. Rapticon Sr. cast fire magic on a group as they fled in terror at the sudden flash of light. Fenrir attached a knife around his double-barreled rifle acting as a bayonet and started shooting his targets.

Yumi joined the scene as she jumped from her Chocobo and engaged the mist-stalkers in battle with her thief gear. She threw a mini-cherry bomb towards them causing them to explode into pieces of flesh and blood.

Ron, while riding on his Chocobo, use his spear to attack the mist-stalkers as they walked closer.

"Harry! Take care of Hermione!" Ron cried as he skewered a mist-stalker

How will he take care of her, he has no idea. He hugged her with his one arm while his other held his sword at ready.

"I'm fine, Harry" Hermione said quietly

"You're not," said Harry "I'll get you out of here, I promise."

Harry tried to avoid battle so he stayed near the Chocobos while the mist-stalkers were engaging battle with the rest of the party. The Moogles were helping too. Mage Moogles would use the best of their magic even if it wasn't their strongest to catch the enemy off guard. Gunners would give covering fire.

"Argh!" Rapticon Sr. yelled as he slammed a mist-stalker to pieces with his hammer. He dropped his hammer and ran for mist-walker. Rapticon Sr. grabbed the creature around its neck and started to wall-run the stone wall and with a "clicking" sound, the neck of the creature snapped.

Rapticon Sr. ran for his hammer and gave a leg sweep to a mist-stalker, he followed his attack with a bash of his hammer to the head making the head explode into bits of flesh and blood.

"You okay, doc?!" Fenrir called from afar as he shot every mist-stalker with his rifle.

"Never better!" Rapticon Sr. said as he punched a mist-stalker in the face

Before Rapticon Sr. could throw another fire magic to the enemy, the mist-stalkers stopped on their tracks. Harry, Ron and Hermione looked up and heard croaking and loud footsteps.

"Son of a bitch," whispered Fenrir "The godfather's here!"

"What?!" Rapticon Sr. looked at Fenrir

"Their leader! He's here!"

Harry knew what was coming. He doesn't know what the leader of the mist-stalkers looked like but whatever it was, it must be bigger than the rest.

The mist-stalkers started flailing their arms disturbingly as the footsteps started getting louder. It's like they are dancing in a welcoming ceremony. Alas, the shadow of a larger and uglier mist-stalker came inside the vicinity. Harry felt a lump in his throat when he saw the claws of the large mist-stalker.

"!!!!!!" screeched the creature with the highest pitch it can reach.

Harry and the rest covered their ears as the high pitch scream echoed through the halls.

"Nice knowing you, Harry." Hermione said weakly

Harry looked at Hermione. She was smiling at him.

"Don't say that," Harry said "Please, don't"

"Who knows, Harry" she continued "If this was our last moment together, I'm glad I'll be dying by your side," Harry was surprised by her grim humor because she started to make a giggle.

“Fenrir, take out the little ones, I’m going for the big daddy” said Rapticon Sr.

“You got it, doc” said Fenrir as he loaded a bullet to his gun

The whole party closed in on each other so they can feel huddled and protected. Rapticon Sr. was in front of the group with Fenrir behind him. They were all in battle position for an attack.

“Kupo, I hope we’ll be okay!” Moco squeaked inside one of the saddlebags.

“Fenrir!” Rapticon Sr.

Harry and company looked on as Fenrir drew out a cherry bomb identical to Yumi’s. He lit it up with a match from his pocket and threw it to Rapticon Sr.

“Fore!!” Rapticon Sr. yelled as he lifted his hammer.

Like a baseball bat from the Muggle game baseball, Rapticon Sr. swung his hammer, slamming the cherry bomb towards the ceiling. Harry saw in amazement as the bomb exploded from above making debris of rock fall down on the majority of mist-stalkers and their leader.

“NOW!” Rapticon Sr. yelled as he mounted his Chocobo. Everyone followed suit and with the commotion going on, Rapticon Sr. and Fenrir lead the way out of the caves as the surviving mist-stalkers chased them to the outdoors.

“That was wicked mad!” Ron yelled from behind “I thought you’ll shoot the blokes!”

“Conned you all to think we were going to do it” Fenrir smirked as they ran across a ravine that lead to darkness below.

“HAAYYAA!!”

Harry and Ron jumped as they heard the same sound from the mist-stalker leader ring their ears.

“That bastard is still alive?!” Fenrir said as they stopped and looked behind them.

It was still alive alright. Harry saw in horror as the now deformed creature with its minions skulked towards them all bloodied up. The thundering footsteps made the party run for their lives. The Chocobos kweh’d in fright as they jumped down a small cliff to the platform below. It did not stop the mist-stalkers’ leader since it jumped towards them and started flailing its arms destroying trees nearby.

“FASTER!!” Rapticon Sr. whipped the reigns of the Chocobo

“Over there!” Harry pointed.

It was a miracle. Harry could see an opening which leads to a wide open field. They were on the brink of escape.

“A few more, Moco, just a few more!” Yumi said to the Moogles

Harry held Hermione tight as he held on the reigns.

Don’t worry, Hermione... we’re almost there!

Ron turned around and saw the mist-stalker leader pull to a full stop.

“Ha! I think it gave up!” he whooped in victory

But Ron whooped too soon. The mist-stalker leader screeched its high pitch scream making the Chocobos concentration disrupted.

“Woah there, fella!” Fenrir as the Chocobo started going off course.

The mist-stalker leader slammed a fist to the ground forcing a strong tremor to commence. Harry was surprised at its strength when a nearby tree fell, blocking their path to freedom.

“Dammit!” Fenrir yelled

The mist-stalker started running towards them with great speed. Harry drew out his sword with everyone following him by drawing out their weapons.

“Give it nothing,” said Rapticon Sr. “But take away everything!”

The mist-stalker leader was already a few feet from them... it drew out its claws. Harry could see the smaller mist-stalkers skulking behind their leader.

“Be prepared!” Fenrir yelled

The creature made one last screech and with a pounce...

BOOM!! BOOM! BOOM!

Harry and the party were startled to see fireworks of fire erupting before them blocking the path of the mist-stalker leader. The creature started to screech in pain as it burned itself. The fireworks of fires somehow triggered a small forest fire around the mist-stalkers making them screech in pain.

“What did you do?!” Fenrir yelled to Rapticon Sr. among the loud fire crackles.

“I didn’t do anything!” Rapticon Sr. shouted back

Harry looked behind them where the fallen tree was lying right now. He jumped on his seat when he saw a young girl in a purple and black robe that looks similar to a Hogwarts robe.

“Ah – ah guys!” Harry called

Everyone turned and was also surprised to see this girl. She had average height, looked to be in her late-teens. She had a pretty face, brown eyes, and shoulder length black hair. Her skin wasn’t white but looked akin to a Latina and mix of Asian in it but despite these similarities, her face looked Caucasian.

Much to their surprise, she was smiling at them. Harry couldn't help it but it was one of the best smiles he's ever seen. He thought Ron was thinking the same thing because he was looking at her in a strange mesmerizing look.

"I hope my helping hand worked," she said in a very sweet and gentle voice "Did it?"

Rapticon Sr. and Fenrir, who had their jaws open looked at the fireworks of fires doing damage to the mist-stalkers and their leader.

"I – ah – Um – er it" said the two in gagged awe "You did great," said Rapticon Sr. and Fenrir at the same time

The young girl smiled.

"Now quick, over the tree log while you still can!" she disappeared to the other side as she jumped down

"Hey!" Harry called

"Follow her..." Hermione moaned

Harry nodded and with the strength of the Chocobos' jump, they jumped up over the tree log and finally united themselves with their rescuer.

"Hurry up!" she said as she told them to follow her out of Moredread Mire.

The party followed her out of Moredread Mire. Harry was again amazed to see the vastness of Atrynömunal before him. Before him was the sea that probably stretched to the Western Continent. The twin moons reflected the seas with perfection... it felt good to feel cool clean breeze again raking his hair. It reminded him of Hogwarts again, his home.

Home...

Harry shook his head back to reality and saw him falling behind the group following this mysterious young girl.

“Um, excuse me?” Rapticon Sr. said as he directed his Chocobo in front of the girl’s path “I hate to be rude, and I thank you for your rescue but... who are you?”

The girl just giggled.

“I’m sorry,” she said “I forgot to introduce myself, my name is Kathryn Silverwalker. I’m an acolyte in the art of black magic”

“The kid’s got it on her run!” Fenrir praised as he chuckled “Say...”

“Kathy,” said Kathy “You can call me Kathy”

“Kathy...” Fenrir said “Do you know where Manem is?”

“Of course, I live there” said Kathy “I usually go here in the edge of the woods to train with gremlins. I was about to start my training until I heard a commotion inside...”

“Kinda brave for ya to get in there, eh?” Fenrir said sounding impressed

“I’m used to this,” Kathy replied “So, will I get a proper introduction from you guys?”

“Not until you get us to Manem, Kate” said Fenrir

“Kathy!” Kathy corrected him though she doesn’t seem annoyed as she walked over a hill. Everyone followed and saw a beautiful gold Chocobo standing there grazing on the grass... the moonlight gave it an ethereal glow. Kathy mounted on it and said

“Her name is Lotty” she stroked the feathers of the Chocobo.

“T-that’s a gold Chocobo, kupo!” Moco said in amazement as he popped out of the saddlebags

“You seem to know your Chocobos... a breeder?” Kathy looked at Moco

“Nope, but I’m learning to be one, kupo!”

At this moment, all of the Moogles flew out of the saddlebags and started fluttering above the party, happy that the worst is over.

“Shall we proceed with the trip?” Rapticon Sr. asked

“Sure, why not?” Kathy nodded politely “It’ll only take a few minute ride.”

Kathy then turned to Harry and noticed Hermione’s groggy state.

“Hey you, there... is your companion okay?”

“Y-yeah, she’s fine” said Harry quickly “I just need to get her to an inn.”

“Don’t worry, there’ll be lots of those at Manem” she then turned to Ron and greeted him with a “Hi” before she turned to Rapticon Sr.

Ron gave a startled look. He felt flustered and bubbly inside. Harry noticed this too and couldn’t help but smirk at Ron’s sudden mood.

“I’ll lead the way,” said Kathy “Ready?”

“Yep,” said Fenrir “Be careful though the road looks –“

“Heeya!!” yelled Kathy as she pulled Lotty’s reigns as the Chocobo zoomed down in such perfect speed and straightness.

“Woah, that girl can ride a Chocobo, kupo...” said one of the Moogles.

“Damn,” said Fenrir and Rapticon Sr. in unison.

“Let’s go then,” said Harry and with a move on, the party followed their new companion, Kathy to the Edge of the Kingdom town of Manem hoping they will get better accommodations than what

Moredread offered, accommodations where they can leave the danger out of the menu.

Meanwhile, somewhere else, Sir Severus Snape, Royal Council member, yells in fury as he threw Rapticon Sr.'s old hammer to the shadows of Moredread Mire in anger as the search party looked on the deserted crash site.

Chapter Fourteen

Getting To Know The Party

Rapticon Sr. yawned while the party traveled slowly on their Chocobos to Manem. He looked back and surveyed the thick forest of Moredread Mire and the towering castle of Biestavale beyond. He frowned and coughed a sigh and turned his attention to his companions.

At front was the girl they met a few of minutes ago, Kathy Silverwalker. It wasn't a secret to him that this girl is innocent. After the few revelations in the past few hours, he couldn't take another betrayal. Behind her was Fenrir Skylar, the sly pilot-slash-Chocobo transporter with his band of Moogles fluttering beside him. They didn't start well but after the cooperation they had in Moredread Mire, Fenrir and Rapticon Sr. made an unspoken agreement that they'll put that behind them for now.

Like they both said to each other,

Everything hangs on Skyld.

Behind Fenrir were Yumi Kusamari and Moco. Rapticon Sr. nearly winced when he remembered that the two got into the mess because of him, Harry and Ron's plan. So far, the two have been cooperative in the journey to Skyld. The reason why they're still with them is because they are marked as fugitives too. They can't easily go back to Biestavale at the hands of the merciless Snape.

I wonder what that bastard is doing now.

To the left of Yumi and Moco was Ron. Until now, he hasn't fully told his story about how he got here, not that it mattered anyway. Ron was also one of the reasons why they are still alive from Operation: Ibarra. Rapticon Sr. surveyed Ron's sleepy state as his head dropped forward.

In front of Rapticon Sr. was Harry together with Hermione. He couldn't help it but he noticed Harry was showing a lot of care for her.

Well, they've been arguing lately so it must be what drove Harry to make sure she's safe. Come to think of it, thinking about Hogwarts-related situations made Rapticon Sr. miss home...

Twelve days... twelve days since we got here...

Rapticon Sr. ticked off the days of their stay in the world of F.F.O. The task can be quite underwhelming since he prays that it won't reach a hundred.

They passed in between two mountains and before them was an enormous valley that was filled with forests, fields and some faraway towns. A fairly large town which happens to be Manem rested on the cliff overlooking the endless sea.

"That's my home right there," said Kathy happily "C'mon, I'll show you the local inn."

- - -

The town of Manem was nothing but peaceful. Harry observed the town's atmosphere as their Chocobos walked across the tiled road. Manem's buildings were usually pale yellow with brown roofs. Most buildings had curved edges and windows usually were circular giving this relaxing feel. Street lamps that had onion-shaped bulbs littered the streets. The place was filled with bakeries and tiny little shops selling the usual items. Harry could hear the distant waves below hitting the cliff wall as the light breeze lifted their hair. The twin moons were shining brightly as the light reflected the roofs of the houses and shops. Manem was very peaceful indeed and distant sounds of a live band could be heard.

"This is it!" said Kathy as she pulled to a stop

Unlike most buildings in Manem, the inn was white framed with red roofs and red lines around the walls. A sign was displayed at the top of the double doors: "Windsor Inn".

"Nice..." Yumi said

Harry noticed Hermione looking up. He saw she looked tired and wished they would get a room soon.

"I love the smell of the sea," Moco commented sniffing the air

Fenrir dismounted from his Chocobo and said

"You guys stay here, I'll check for any reservations."

"I can help you if you want," Kathy said immediately as she dismounted from her Chocobo.

"I think you helped us enough so no thanks –"

"Not enough though." Kathy cut Fenrir's talk "as my parents' own the inn."

Fenrir stopped speaking in mid-sentence and closed his mouth. He nodded and looked at the party who were stifling their laughs at his slight judgment.

"I didn't know, okay?" Fenrir replied in a brush-the-blame off sort of way

"Yeah, yeah, Sawyer" said Rapticon Sr. dismounting his Chocobo and pulling it towards the side where a Chocobo pen was "And I didn't that there's a plaque that entitles the ownership!"

Fenrir scoffed at Rapticon Sr.'s nickname calling and looked behind him to see a plaque beside the double doors of the inn stating the ownership was indeed to the Silverwalker family.

"Ha ha ha," Fenrir said lazily "Let's go inside." He growled

Fenrir, Kathy and Harry with Hermione entered the inn while the rest pulled their Chocobos to the pen at the side.

The lobby of the Windsor Inn was a cross between a café and a lounge. The first thing they saw was a circular foyer with a counter at the other side. The other side behind the counter had two sets of

staircases that were symmetrically placed at each end of the counter. To the left was an opening arch that leads to a living room where visitors can rest and lounge around. To the right was a café. Harry could smell the fragrance of coffee beans when he walked across the foyer with Hermione by his side.

“Smells like a Starbucks-slash-Central Perk.” Rapticon Sr. said as he entered the place with the rest.

“What?” Ron raised an eyebrow to Rapticon Sr.

The party went forward to the counter where a middle-aged lady in a blue poncho bowed.

“Welcome to the Windsor Inn!” she greeted happily with a heavy accent.

“Hi, Ms. DeGroot!” Kathy said

“Ah, Kathy!” she replied “I see you’re back from your training”

“I’m not entirely done since I had to help these guys” she gestured to the party “They’re looking for a place to stay, did dad leave open slots?”

“Your father and mother are at the marketplace getting supplies for the restaurant” said Ms DeGroot “They’ll be back soon but I can check up if there are available rooms”

“Got it,” said Kathy with a smile as she turned to the rest “You guys can stay at the living room over there while you wait for any free rooms.”

“Thanks,” Hermione muttered

“I’ll get myself a drink” said Fenrir as he walked towards the café.

“C’mon you guys” said Ron

Moco and Moogles walked inside the comfortable living room which Harry could relate to the Gryffindor common room. He frowned when he saw a cross-stitched tapestry of a golden lion above the fireplace which was happily roaring with fire. Moco and the Moogles scurried happily in front of the fire to keep themselves warm. Ron sank to a nearby squashy armchair and let out a sigh. Yumi hopped on the stool near the fireplace as she smiled at the Moogles relaxing.

"You can sit here, Hermione" said Harry as he carried Hermione to sit down on the couch. "I'll check if there's something to drink"

"Thank you, Harry" she said quietly and smiled at him

Harry smiled back and walked out of the lounge, across the hall and into the café.

Meanwhile, Rapticon Sr. was at the foyer with Kathy who was speaking with Ms. DeGroot.

"Kathy, right?" Rapticon Sr. asked

"Yeah," Kathy replied

"Would you excuse us for a moment, miss?" Rapticon Sr. asked as he moved a step away from the counter with Kathy following "Well?"

"Luckily, there are seven rooms available" said Kathy "Each room can hold four people and there is a pair of rooms that are connected to each other."

"That's nice," Rapticon Sr. smirked "We'll take three. One with no connected room"

"Alrighty!" said Kathy

"Wait –" Rapticon Sr. cut Kathy before she could turn to Ms. DeGroot

Kathy raised her eyebrows waiting for an answer

“Ummm...” Rapticon Sr. scratched the back of his head “You happen to be very supportive to us for the past few moments and I’d like to thank you for all of that but –“ he raised his voice a bit before she could reply “I want to know why”

“Being good has its rewards” she said happily “You would probably know that”

“Why would I know that?”

“You’re part of the Order” she spoke calmly

Rapticon Sr. chuckled and looked at his phoenix pendant.

“I get that a lot” he said in a low voice

“I won’t push it but hey,” said Kathy “Order members deserve help when they themselves help a lot of people. Were you at Moredread Mire to help those people with you?”

“N-no” Rapticon Sr. stammered “In fact, we are group of guys who need to go to Skyld. Somehow, we crashed at Moredread Mire”

“That was you?!” Kathy cried in surprise

Rapticon Sr.’s heart raced. Does she know about the kidnapping? Will she turn them in?

“Uh – er –“

“Gosh, I was meditating at the by the cliff when I saw an airship came crashing down the forest”

Rapticon Sr. sighed, she probably doesn’t know.

“You haven’t called anyone about it?” Rapticon Sr. asked

“No, but I did set a perimeter check around the edges of the forest to see if some survivors came out... then I heard a ruckus in the woods and I found you guys” she said

"Ah, I see" Rapticon Sr. nodded

"Anyway" Kathy said pulling a lock of her black hair behind her ear
"your room will be ready in a few minutes"

"Thank you, Kathy" said Rapticon Sr. "We'll be at the lounge"

Rapticon Sr. left Kathy to her thoughts.

- - -

Harry sat on the bar stool of the café's bar. Fenrir was beside him drinking what seems to be a bottle of beer.

"Came to drink your sorrows away, Arthur?" Fenrir said taking a swig of the bottle.

"Nope," Harry said ignoring his nickname calling "Just to get water for Hermione"

"Ya know, her name ain't safe in these parts when you're on the run" said Fenrir

It was probably the last few events that made Harry's head a blur but Fenrir was right. If Snape was indeed on to them, his agents are probably looking around for them including the kingdom. Speaking of which, they are also accused for kidnap and murder... pretty soon, news on the death of the king will spread across the land... maybe at the morning? Harry's heart thumped harder. He turned around looking for Rapticon Sr.

Don't worry about that right now, Harry... just relax...

Harry sighed and relaxed at his chair.

"You okay, buddy?" Fenrir asked putting his bottle down

"I'm fine." Harry said

Harry's thoughts raced in his mind... he's tired, he needs to rest... he just needs to relax, right? You can worry about tomorrow... relax now...

"Ya know, Princess Peach can't wait for ya that long back there" Fenrir said bringing Harry back to his reverie

"What?" Harry looked at Fenrir confusingly

"I mean, she's your girl, ain't she? You've been taking care of her the whole time!"

"She's not my girlfriend," said Harry

"Of course you're not," Fenrir chuckled, pulled a lock of his dirty blonde hair from his eyes and drank the contents of his beer

"And what does that supposed to mean?" Harry asked keeping his voice even

"I'm just sayin' things should be left not knowin' if it's for your own good, kid" Fenrir said slyly

"Hey, I'm just being a friend... she needs proper care and –"

"One thing I don't really get is that you're too defensive" Fenrir cut in "It's pretty obvious you care a lot about the general's daughter - !"

"Her name is Hermione" Harry said irritably

"Whatever you say, Linus!" Fenrir said in mock apology "Geez, I'm just trying to start a conversation and I all I get is a –"

"Forget about it," Harry blurted out and called the bartender "I'd like two bottles of water, please"

"You can't forget about the facts – Harry is it?" Fenrir said as the bartender went to get Harry's order

"Yes," Harry muttered

“Look, all I’m saying is... Hermione is someone you should never let go” said Fenrir in his heavy southern accent.

“What?” Harry looked at him puzzlingly

“I mean, gosh gee, she’s a famous face, you care a lot about her, she’s got the looks – so why don’t ya go for it?” Fenrir’s face broke to a smile “Like aiming for the target and –“ he mimicked his hand to look like a gun “-BAM!”

“Your order, sir” said the bartender.

“I - I have no idea what you’re talking about” Harry blurted out quickly taking the bottles “Excuse me, I’ll be off”

“Be my guest” said Fenrir giving Harry a triumphant look “Remember, Bam!”

The moment Harry took the bottles of water, he left for the living room. He didn’t know if he liked Fenrir or not... it wasn’t a secret to himself that he cared a whole lot about Hermione... maybe that’s Fenrir’s idea? Maybe he was just curious about how he, Harry, cares a lot about Hermione and for the fact he likes her?

Woah there...

Harry shook his head and chuckled. He’s just thinking stupid things now, he thought.

“Here ya go, Hermione” Harry said kindly, sitting beside her

Hermione, who looked half-asleep on her seat, simply nodded. Harry couldn’t help but notice how pretty she looked on the couch. The light of the fire made her skin bloom peacefully... the dirt on her face which was washed away thanks to Harry showcased her soft skin.

“Harry?”

Hermione was looking at him wonderingly. Harry realized this and shook his head.

“A – are you alright?” Harry said, trying to keep Hermione on the subject of her condition.

“I’m fine, Harry, thank you” she said unscrewing the bottle cap and drinking. “That’s so relaxing...” she moaned quietly. Her voice sounded soft, gentle and tired. Harry smiled at that fact because it gave her this heavenly feel around her.

“So, we’ll you introduce me to your friends?” Hermione asked quietly, not keeping her eyes from the fireplace

“I will... eventually... there’s a lot of damage control we have to do” Harry explained, that moment he turned his head to the opening arch that lead to the foyer, he saw Fenrir leaning against the archway across the foyer leading to the café. He smirked and winked at Harry and mouthed him a “BAM!” while mimicking a pistol shot with his hands.

Harry gave him a look of disgust and Fenrir was just chuckling while drinking his beer bottle. Harry sighed and turned to Hermione who was emptying the contents of her water bottle.

“You know,” Hermione said softly after her swig “two years ago I was at this very inn...”

“Really?” Harry said feeling happy that Hermione was now talking about normal stuff again “You were here with your father?”

“No,” she giggled softly “I was with Elias.”

For some reason, an uncomfortable lurch filled below Harry’s lung area... he didn’t know why but the fact that Hermione was telling the last time she was in this place was with her ex-boyfriend made him feel a bit... affronted.

“This is where he asked me if I could be his girlfriend,” Hermione continued “It was kind of a strange night but well, it was great... too

bad it didn't end well" she frowned "But I can always find another person just hope that he's the real one"

Harry didn't say anything... he wanted Hermione to say anything... he didn't know why he just wanted her to do so.

"And?" Harry asked

"Elias is the last boyfriend I had..." Hermione admitted as she blushed "I – I never had one even on this day"

"Hey," Harry held Hermione's hand "It's nothing to be ashamed of... look at me, I don't really know my past"

"You do?" Hermione tilted her head

Harry didn't know why but for some reason, the words that came from his mouth felt... real. As if he knew that he didn't know about his past... it could be referring to the fact he has no idea what part he plays in this world... but why did he stated it as if it was part of his natural instinct?

"Yeah... I do..." Harry said "I can't remember anything before..."

"Tell me," Hermione said in an unusually pleading tone

"Tell you what?" Harry looked at Hermione

"Everything... you seem to know me very much" she said calmly "You never explained why... I want to know..."

Harry's heart thumped hard. He didn't know how difficult it would be to tell her what he has experienced... how she is his best friend... how he cared a lot about her... how they argued the last time they entered this place...

"Well?" Hermione looked at Harry in a serious way

Harry wanted to let out stammer when –

“Your rooms are ready, dears” said Ms. DeGroot

“Excellent!” Rapticon Sr. rubbed his palms together “Thank you for the accommodations, ma’am! We’ll be off to our rooms, thank you!”

Ms. DeGroot handed Rapticon Sr. the keys. After another thank you to her, Kathy led them to the upper floor.

“This place was founded by my grandfather before the Great Atrynömunal War,” she explained “After a few years of it being used as a soldiers’ lounge, my grandfather decided to renovate the whole place to what it’s become now”

“It’s lovely!” Yumi exclaimed as they took another flight of stairs to the third floor.

“Haha, thanks... I designed the place” she added rather sheepishly

“Get out” Fenrir jokingly said “My mom can’t even think up a look for her own room” he looked at the moldings of the walls.

Kathy brought them to the fourth floor. The hallways were tiled with red carpet and the walls were like the ones at the first floor. The walls were lit by lamps that were shaped like glass Chocobo heads. Each door was labeled with a gold number... Harry saw that Kathy brought them to room 415, 416 and 417.

“415 and 416 is the connected one, 417 is a quad-single room” Kathy explained “Okay... so I can leave you to this place?”

“Thank you so much, Kathy” Yumi bounced on the balls of her feet “You have no idea how grateful we are!”

In a split second, just right there... Harry could’ve sworn Kathy made a tiny tremble in her lower lip in an unusual way... he thought he was seeing things since Kathy smiled at Yumi.

“Er – thanks, miss” said Ron suddenly. Everyone looked at him.

“You can call me, Kathy” she said walking towards him “And you are?”

“M-me?” Ron said looking flushed “R-R-Ron”

“Ron!” she repeated happily “Nice name...” she then turned to the party and said “I hope you enjoy your stay at the Windsor Inn! If you need anything just look for Ms. DeGroot, okay? Alrighty then, see ya guys!”

The party bade Kathy goodbye as she climb down the stairs and disappeared.

“Me and these three...” Rapticon Sr. gestured to Harry, Ron and Hermione “will take 417... you guys take the latter”

“Sure,” Fenrir said taking room 415 and 416 “C’mon...” he said to his Moogles.

Rapticon Sr. turned the key on room 417 which was across the hall from 415 and 416.

“Not bad for a hundred gil...” Rapticon Sr. muttered as he observed the room.

Harry helped Hermione to one of the fluffy beds. She sighed in relief as she lay on the bed... for once it felt good to lie on something comfortable after the fiasco that happened.

The room had four large beds that occupied four points of the room in a symmetric fashion. At the center of the room was an end table that had a large fruit basket. The ceiling above had very artistic paintings of Sentinels and people... Harry could relate the style of the paintings to the paintings he would usually see at a church. Across the room, opposite the door, was a viewing balcony that overlooked the sea, Biestavale to the left and most of Manem to the far right. A bathroom was placed exactly to the right once you entered the room.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!” Ron sighed in relief as he lay on the bed making the sheets dirty thanks to his dirty clothing.

“Here,” Rapticon Sr. said pulling his messenger bag which Harry only noticed now over his head “You can wear this...”

Rapticon Sr. pulled out clean clothes and passed them to Harry and Ron. Hermione didn't need any since she was already wearing clean clothes from Moredread Mire.

“No if you excuse me, I'll take a shower” said Rapticon Sr. taking his own clothes and walked towards the bathroom.

There was a long silence with the sounds only coming from the distant waves from the sea, the sound of Rapticon Sr. using the shower and the squeaking of Ron's bed as he hopped on it.

“It's quite bouncy,” Ron said

Harry smirked sitting on the bed beside Hermione... it's been a while since he shared a room with two of his best friends. He looked at Hermione who was reading one of the inn's guideline cards... something about calling room service.

“Will you tell me now?” Hermione suddenly said breaking the silence putting the guideline card down on the end table.

Ron stopped bouncing on the bed and looked at Harry puzzlingly. Harry gave Ron a significant look and turned to Hermione.

“Er – specifically about what Hermione?” Harry asked kindly

“Everything...” she said softly “For one, you know about things I haven't shared with to anyone, you know for a fact that the castle I dream about has a name... a name which I saw in the dream... I doubt anyone can see that, no one can see dreams of others”

Ron walked towards Harry and Hermione and sat on the foot of Hermione's bed.

“Before we say anything,” said Harry “We want you to know that we will not stop you if you explain your own side of things...”

Ron gave Harry a significant look which Harry replied with a nod. Hermione looked at Harry and Ron and nodded.

“Fire away...” she said

“Er... I’ll begin” said Ron “The bottom line is... us three... you, me, and Harry know each other.”

“I know that,” Hermione said “But why? You told me I have amnesia but I recall that I perfectly know my life and my past... you saw the crystal didn’t you?” she winced

Harry remembered what the crystal showed back at the throne room hours ago.

“Yes...” Harry said admitted “But the things is –“

Harry stopped and looked at Ron. Going into a debate on the world’s reality to an already established Hermione is not going to be easy.

“What?” Hermione asked

“The thing is...” Ron continued for Harry “We reckon that the three of us know each other because us three, and Rapticon Sr. don’t live here”

There was a slight silence that followed.

“Okay,” Hermione briskly said then before she could say a word, she gave them a confused look “er – what?”

“Listen,” Harry explained carefully “We know it will be a bit over-the-top for you but you have to believe us –“

“I have to believe you after you used my trust to kidnap me?” Hermione said coolly

“Don’t use that against me, okay?” Harry said irritably “You know now that it was right to be kidnapped – not that we were planning to. We have a reason why”

“Then tell me now” Hermione said at once

“Alright... alright” Harry looked at Ron and back to Hermione “The three of us... we know each other, we are best friends. The thing is, we don’t live here... this world, this place” he said slowly “You and I including Ron, we came here to this world from another dimension”

“So you’re telling me, I came from another plane?” Hermione said

“Yes!” Harry said and continued “You see... that other plane or dimension is the real world. Earth. Hogwarts”

Harry put his hands in prayer and made a look of longing to Hermione hoping it will click in her mind.

“I – I don’t understand Harry” Hermione said but was cut off by Ron

“Would it help to say that a book sucked us in to this place?”

“A step at a time, Ron!” Harry said

“I can’t take it anymore, Harry!” Ron blurted out “I – I’m sorry but I can’t take this whole image that Hermione doesn’t even know us!”

“Take it easy!” Harry said standing up and walking towards Ron “We’ll find a way, okay”

Ron simply nodded and twiddled his thumbs.

“Okay now,” Harry continued and sat on the bed again “Anyway... the book... as Ron said”

“What book?” Hermione looked at Harry in the eyes

“It’s a book... it’s what started this whole fiasco – lets say that in this world I told you about, the three of us were working on something that

lead to this certain book” Harry took a deep breath and said “This book somehow started a wormhole that brought us here... this place. Rapticon Sr. told us that the book belongs to a sorcerer named Accula. He created this world, this place, the characters, the venues, everything.

“But when we went here, this place, Atrynömunal, we somehow found out that we to have our own place in this world like how you are the general’s daughter. How Accula is Archmage of Skyld... we are not sure what our –“ he gestured to himself and Ron “place is but whatever it is, it must be something.”

Hermione shifted on her seat and replied

“Let’s say that I am part of your whole – quote and quote – ‘thing’” she did quotation gestures with her hands “Then why can’t I remember perfectly about who I was? You three seem to remember what happened before going here”

“That... I really don’t know” Harry said lamely “In fact, at this point, I’m more interested to know what’s going on with you than getting out of this place.”

Hermione looked at Harry.

“Look, Harry... I’m sorry but this is too farfetched to let me believe you –“

“Can’t you remember anything?” Ron desperately asked “Anything related to Hogwarts?”

“Well, I have no idea how you know about that but yes, I had a dream of a castle named Hogwarts” she said

“Then there!” Ron said “That’s our proof! You said no one knows about your dreams but we somehow know a castle named Hogwarts which we all study at!”

“Study?” Hermione’s eyes widened “I – I never mentioned it was a school”

“But it is!” Ron said “C’mon, admit it... it’s a school, right?”

Hermione looked down and nodded.

“You see now?” Harry said “We know you... we even know how you like to place the ink bottle at the upper right of your workspace because at it’s less tedious to ink your quill than to bring your arm across to the other side”

Hermione winced a bit.

“You probably knew that from Uncle Olaf –“

“No!” Harry and Ron said at once

“Wait - !” Ron said “that ring!” he pointed to Hermione’s hand

Harry’s eyes widened... of course!

- - -

“Well? Have you found the perfect gift?” Rapticon Sr. said sitting behind his desk

“No, sir...” Harry said “Er... can I go now?”

Rapticon Sr. nodded. Harry turned on his heel but before he reached the door -

“Harry!”

Harry turned and caught something Rapticon Sr. threw at him. It was a catalog that said Witch Jewel? Harry looked up at Rapticon Sr. confusingly.

“That’s a catalog of one of the finest jewelry in the wizarding world” Rapticon Sr. said not looking at Harry “Get Hermione a great gift or else I’m gonna dock points from you” he added jokingly.

Harry smiled and said "Thanks, professor"

"No problem" Rapticon Sr. said as he started rummaging around his desk.

A few days later, Harry waited in the Owlery, he looked outside the window and saw most students at the lake below enjoying the weekend. To the right, Hagrid was drinking a cup of tea with Fang sleeping beside him. Harry sighed.

"I can't believe I forgot about Hermione's birthday present..." he looked at his wristwatch "It should be here by now!"

Harry was about to give up when he heard the flapping of wings. Harry looked out of the window and saw a tawny owl carrying a tiny package.

"Yes!" he said happily as it landed on the windowsill "Thanks," he said to the owl as he untied the package from the owl which hooted idly.

Afterwards, the tawny owl fluttered to the nearby water basin and took off. Harry smiled and opened the small box. A golden ring with a large ruby on the top of the band sat inside the box.

"Harry?"

Harry jumped and closed the box. He turned and saw Hermione holding a letter.

"H-Hermione!" he said nervously as he put the box inside his pocket quickly "What are you doing here?"

"I'm sending this letter to my mum," she said as she looked around for an owl "How about you?"

"Same reason you're here..." Harry said instantly

"I see..." she said and looked at Harry "By the way, thanks for the surprise party last night... I'm grateful" she smiled

“Haha, no problem” he said “Hermione, I have some other business to do, I’ll see you around, okay?”

“Sure... wait - before you go, can I borrow Hedwig?” she asked

“Y-yeah, sure!” Harry nodded before leaving out of the Owlery

Hermione giggled.

“Oh, Harry... you’re so nice...”

Hermione was about to look for Hedwig when she realized...

“Wait... he was here for the same reason I am...” she furrowed her brows “but Harry doesn’t have parents anymore... or –“ her eyes widened “Does he?”

- - -

“I gave you that ring for your birthday!” Harry explained hoping Hermione will remember “Remember? It was two days after your birthday and I gave it to you since I had a hard time wrapping it!”

“That’s ridiculous!” Hermione exclaimed “This was given to me by someone else two years ago at my birthday!”

Harry stopped abruptly from speaking... he didn’t know why, what happened or whatever but for the first time in his life, he felt a bit heartbroken. He felt hurt, he felt a bit strange under his gut... why is he feeling this way? Was it because she got that ring, a gift from him during one of the memorable moments in his friendship with her, from some stranger he didn’t know?! How in blazes did that ring get in this world?!

“Did... did I say something wrong?” Hermione asked worriedly looking at Harry with the most concerned face she gave him...

That look... Harry thought to himself looking at her sadly... he felt like welling up... she gives me that look whenever I feel bothered by a problem...

“Harry?” Ron asked in concern

Harry looked at Ron, he realized his eyes were watery. He wiped them quickly with his sleeve.

“Excuse me for a moment –“ Harry said and he abruptly left the room.

“Harry!” Hermione called out but all was heard was the door slam shut.

A moment later, Rapticon Sr. came out dressed in a brown coat.

“What happened? I heard some talking, a bit of loud voices then a door closing”

“Nothing...” Ron said walking towards Rapticon Sr. “But we were...” he lowered his voice “...telling Hermione everything we know”

“Good, good” Rapticon Sr. said nodding “Well?”

“Well what?”

“Got anything out of her?”

“Oh – er -... not really... I think Harry’s upset about it though...” Ron grimaced “He suddenly stormed out of the room”

“He’s going to be alright,” said Rapticon Sr. “Your best friend forgets about the fond memories back then, what’s not to be sad about?”

- - -

It’s been more than an hour since they arrived. After cleaning up and settling in their rooms, their tummies were grumbling loudly so the whole party decided to have dinner down at the café. Harry was quiet the whole time... Hermione and Ron, who were looking at him from the other side of the table, and started wondering if he’s going to be okay. Rapticon Sr. told them to brush it off their moods.

“He’ll turn up,” he said as he punctured a fat juicy steak with his fork
“He’s always like that...”

After dinner, everyone in the party started talking to each other. Harry, who had nothing better to do, sat with Yumi at the fireplace in the living room area.

“You’ve been awfully quiet for the past hour” said Yumi after a whole moment of silence “Somethin’s botherin’ ya?”

Harry shook his head. He felt the warmth of the fire overwhelm him... it was relaxing.

“So... what happened?” Yumi asked

Harry turned to her. She put a straight face at him.

“Hours ago?”

“Yeah... you kinda promise me and Moco a clear explanation...” she said quietly

Harry looked behind him and saw they were the only ones at the living room. Was it risky to tell her?

“Where’s Moco?”

“He’s still eating... I can tell him later.”

Harry sighed. For the first time ever, he recounted the events to Yumi... the Snape revelation, Scipio’s true intentions, the murder, the escape. He left out personal parts like how Hermione is a Summoner. Yumi was quiet the whole time until Harry finished the story.

“So... we are on our way to Skyld for Archmage Accula... while on the run from the kingdom?” she asked slowly

“Yes... I’m sorry” Harry replied

“Don’t be...” she said waving a hand “I’m just worried about my family back home...”

“You never told me that much of your family...” Harry said kindly

“Oh bollocks, you wouldn’t want to hear about it, it’s quite a disaster, really” she giggled

“Try me.” Harry said

Yumi then blushed. Harry, surprised at this, turned away from her and stared into the fire. Did he say something wrong?

“Umm... well, my mother is alive and well... my father isn’t.”

“I’m sorry.” Harry interjected

“No, its okay...” she then looked away “I really didn’t know him...”

“Oh...” Harry looked at the fireplace again. Could it be possible that Yumi is frowning? She looks like she was hiding someone the moment she said her last statement.

“Estranged?” Harry asked before he could stop himself.

Yumi didn’t even look at him but she answered anyway.

“Estranged is too strong...” she said quietly “I just didn’t know my old man, that’s all.”

“So tell me,” Yumi said “Is Hermione really your girlfriend?”

Harry turned to Yumi who was smirking at him.

“No.” Harry said “Sorry that I lied to you –“

“Don’t be such an egg muffin, Harry” she said jokingly “You had your reasons, I guess... besides, you’re not the only who righteously lies at times...”

Harry and Yumi shared a moment of looking at each other and smiling.

“Hey,” Yumi said “No matter what happens, I’ll be there, got it?”

Harry chuckled.

“It’ll be dangerous, no doubt...”

“Well, we are trying to find a way to get you out of here... that sounds more like fun than dangerous if ya ask me” she smiled

“Why did you take our word for it, Yumi?” Harry asked “Us being from another world? Why weren’t you doubtful?”

Yumi rubbed her chin thoughtfully and said

“Frankly...” she stretched her legs forward “...I saw it in your eyes back at Ibarra when I saved you, I saw the fear in your eyes... it was like something that you felt lost, you didn’t wish that this would happen, that it would end this way...” she looked at Harry and smiled “That nailed it for me... because of that, I have never trusted your word than ever.”

Harry smirked.

“Thanks, Yumi”

“No problem” Yumi said

Meanwhile, from the entrance of the living room, Hermione was leaning on the archway, staring at Yumi and Harry.

“Got a problem, princess?” said the laid back voice of Fenrir as he stood beside her

Hermione chuckled.

“No... it’s nothing really...”

Fenrir took a swig of a bottle of beer.

"Looks like a Mon and Chan moment over there," he chuckled referring to Harry and Yumi.

"Yes... a moment" Hermione said loosely

"Somethin's botherin' ya?" Fenrir asked

Hermione shook her head slightly and looked at Fenrir.

"How about you? What brings you here?" she asked

"Nothin'" said Fenrir taking a drink "Just thought I'd drop a line and ask how our VIP was"

"I'm fine, thank you" Hermione said, still looking at Harry and Yumi
"What do you know about her?" she asked suddenly.

"Eh?" Fenrir stopped drinking

"Her, that girl... Yumi, correct?"

"Yeah, what about her?"

"Do you know anything about her?" Hermione asked

"Nothin' much" said Fenrir "Except she's a thief based on her clothing... and that she and Harry know each other a lot... from what I can see"

"Oh..." Hermione said, sounding a bit off. Hermione looked on and felt a small bubbling sensation build around her insides... Why can't Harry tell me how he's feeling?

"Got a wrench in your brain, Hermione?" Fenrir asked

"N-No... I was j-just... wondering, that's all..." Hermione said "Is there a wrench on your brain?" Hermione reiterated Fenrir's question to him

“Who me?” Fenrir chuckled “Nope, all I just want is doc over there – “ he gestured to Rapticon Sr. at the café “to keep to his word when we get to Skyld. Whatever it is...”

“What did you bargain?” Hermione asked not looking at Fenrir

“At a glance... I'll lead him to Skyld and I'll get a new airship” he said
“I was suppose to go to Gergone tonight”

“What were you suppose to do in Gergone?” Hermione asked

For a second there, Hermione spotted a bit of hesitation in Fenrir's voice before he could say anything.

“Er – just business...” he said

Hermione chuckled.

“What's so funny?” Fenrir said in his sly affronted manner

Hermione stopped.

“You've got problems that you won't reveal... we're both in the same boat” she smiled

“Oh really?” Fenrir chuckled and took a swig of bear.

“Well, I'm done here.” Hermione said “Now, if you'd excuse me –“

Hermione then headed towards the stairs. Before she took the first step –

“Hey, Brownie!” called Fenrir

Hermione turned to Fenrir.

“Don't be too hard on yourself,” he advised cryptically “They're just talkin'”

Hermione, who looked at him confusingly, just nodded, smiled and went up the stairs.

- - -

A little later, the whole café was in a nice small gathering. Rapticon Sr. and Fenrir, who were now drinking their worries away (except for Rapticon Sr. who drank one mug) as they broke into song and danced on the table while everyone laughed and clapped along the melody.

Oh you can search far and wide,
You can drink the whole town dry.
You'll never find a beer so brown
But you'll never find a beer so brown
As the one we're drinking in our town.
You can kick your fancy ales.
You can drink 'em by the flagon.
But the only brew for the brave and true . . .
Comes from the Green Dragon!

Hermione recognized the song as she went down the landing of the foyer. She decided to speak to Harry on his problem with her... why did he not speak to her awhile ago? She deducted that Harry must've said something to Yumi... was she being jealous that Yumi and Harry must've known each other more than her and Harry? She shook her head and walked into the living room.

"Harry?"

Harry wasn't around. She groaned and walked towards the noisy café as Rapticon Sr. was telling everyone a tale about three drunken men.

Hermione ignored Rapticon Sr.'s storytelling and went to Ron, who was listening in to the story at the far end of the table Rapticon Sr. was sitting on.

"You're Ron, right?" Hermione winced

Ron looked at her and smiled.

"I always will be" he said

"Oh good – um – have you seen Harry?" Hermione asked

"Sorry, Hermione" Ron shook his head "I don't know where he is..."

"Who?" Fenrir butted in from the other side of the table

"Harry." Hermione said

"Oho!" Fenrir said with a menacing grin while taking a swig of his mug of beer "Looks like princess is going to take some action!"

"Just answer her, Fenrir" said Yumi sternly, who was beside him, she must've overheard the conversation.

"Don't worry, don't worry" Fenrir raised his hands apologetically while smirking "Just playin'! He's outside sitting along the benches there" he thumbed behind him

Hermione thanked Fenrir, stood up and left the room.

"The nerve of him..." she muttered

She then started hearing Rapticon Sr. tell the punch line making everyone break in laughter as she opened the door to the outside.

Before she could hear the rest of it, she closed the door and saw Harry sitting at the bench to the left. She frowned at him, he looked so sad staring into space.

"You come out here often?" Harry asked looking at the distance

"No," Hermione said forcing a chuckle "What are you doing out here?"

"I don't know..." Harry said in dull voice "Getting fresh air... how was dinner?"

"It was fine... did you eat already?" Hermione walked to Harry

Harry put up a hotdog sandwich which made Hermione notice that he was chewing.

“Oh...” she said softly “Can I sit beside you?”

Harry nodded and Hermione sat beside him.

“What’s going on inside?” Harry asked hearing the sound of singing

“They are probably... having fun” she said awkwardly “Er... Harry? Are you alright?”

Harry took a deep breath and took a bite of his hotdog.

“I’m alright...”

“No you’re not” Hermione suddenly blurted out, she slapped her mouth as if she swore a very bad word. Harry looked at Hermione seriously.

“H-Harry” she continued putting her hand down “i-it’s just that... oh, Harry... I’m sorry... I really don’t know how to say this...”

“It’s fine,” said Harry “I’m just...”

“Devastated?” Hermione winced

“No...” Harry looked down “Well – yeah... I am a bit devastated if you want to call it that way”

Harry laughed which Hermione mimicked.

“You know...” Hermione said scooting closer to Harry “You’ve been brave today...”

Harry didn’t say anything which urged Hermione to continue.

"You carried me throughout the whole run... I feel a lot better now after the amounts of potions Ron helped me with... and I feel better not because of the potions... it's because of you"

Harry looked at Hermione who was smiling at him... she felt a bit affronted when he saw Harry's eyes wet.

"H-Harry? Are you crying?"

"N-No..." Harry said turning away from quickly and wiping his eye with the wrist cuffs of his shirt "I'm fine... I just realized something..."

"Look, Harry... honey," Hermione said grabbing his hand "I know it's hard for you... look, I think this story you're trying to tell me... this whole 'we don't live in this world' thing... is very hard to believe... I tried, alright? For the past hour, I tried thinking hard if I remembered you from somewhere... I really can't, okay? I'm sorry... I just really don't know you that well..."

Harry made a sudden sniff. Hermione then saw a tear falling from the side of his cheek... she frowned.

"Alright, now you're crying" she said wryly

"Oh – I – err... sorry" he said chuckling as he wiped it away

"Harry... are you sad because of me?"

"I'm not sad, Hermione – I"

Hermione shushed him by pressing a finger to his lips.

"Harry... don't lie to me... Elias' attitude has taught me how to detect lies now –"

Hermione realized that she was close to Harry... she saw into his green eyes... she never realized they looked brilliant... but the emptiness they're showing now...

"Hermione?" Harry spoke through her finger

Hermione immediately blushed and leaned away from Harry.

“Sorry... I – I was you know... never mind –“ she shook her head “Anyway... Harry...” she held his hand again “Can you tell me, please? Obviously, something’s bothering you...”

“You know,” Harry said in a shaky voice “Before we went to this world...” he looked at her “This place... you and I had a big fight”

“We did?” Hermione said not interrupting him even if it sounded absurd... she doesn’t even recall having a fight with Harry before...

“Yeah... and now I feel guilty –“ he said as his voice turned shaky again “ – because I never said sorry to you and since you are not the Hermione I know – no offense – I feel that I’m burdened with something I should finish...”

Hermione didn’t know what to say... she felt very sorry for Harry... this Hermione he knows about... they must be very good friends, Hermione thought... but could it be her?

“You can say sorry to me.” Hermione said at once

“It’s not the same...”

“Oh come on, Harry” Hermione smiled

Harry looked at Hermione... she was serious indeed. He looked at their interlocked hands. He remembered the care and the love Hermione has shown him for the past years... he smiled at her... and can’t help it... he loved Hermione as a friend...

“But you know,” Harry chuckled “You have to know that we both fought –“

“Haha,” Hermione said sarcastically “It’s not like you won’t miss an inch of the Snitch –“

Hold the phone, Harry thought.

“What did you say?” Harry looked at Hermione quickly. She just said “Snitch”.

Hermione was looking confused herself.

“I – I really don’t know –“ she shook her head “I said ‘Snitch’... it’s like it came into my head –“ she then sighed “I – er – sorry...” she giggled “I think it’s a name from an old pet I used to have, I think...”

It was no mistake... did an old memory of Hermione popped out? Did she remember what Harry was good at? Quidditch? The feelings of being forgotten, lost and negative ebbed away... Hermione was remembering again!

“Y-You said you don’t know how the word ‘Snitch’ came up! Can’t you think further?” Harry asked anxiously standing up

“N-No, Harry... sorry” she frowned

Harry then crouched before her so their eyes were leveled to each other.

“Anything at all, Hermy?” Harry asked

Hermione smiled quietly.

“I guess you also know about my secret nickname...” she said blushing

Harry chuckled sadly.

“Yeah, you hate being called that...”

Hermione and Harry laughed. Harry looked at Hermione... could she possibly get her memory back? Was this word ‘Snitch’ a sign? Harry didn’t know but he wanted to find out...

“Are you alright now?” Hermione asked

Harry nodded.

“Never better, Hermione” Harry smiled.

- - -

“You promised you’d get her back tonight!” General Grangeré bellowed to Sir Severus Snape inside the Situation Chamber an hour since Snape arrived.

“With all due respect, Jacques” said Snape slyly as he wiped his face with a handkerchief “I’d rather speak in the volumes of a civilized man...” then he took a deep breath “We couldn’t locate your daughter, Jacques. The fugitives must’ve left Moredread Mire to hide in the mountains”

Jacques then collapsed to a chair and started ruffling his brown hair hysterically.

“I – I should’ve been... m-more careful...” he muttered

“Sire,” Snape drawled on “Don’t be too harsh on yourself! You are the great general of the kingdom! You – of all generals I’ve known – are the only one who can get into a political or war-related mess and come out of it in one piece! It pains me to see you sulk at this matter!”

Jacques did not answer.

“Or perhaps...” Snape said putting his fingers together and looking at Jacques menacingly “You can always go for the direct and ruthless approach”

Jacques looked at Snape intriguingly.

“What do you mean, Severus?” he asked stiffly

“Oh – nothing” said Severus in an laid back manner “I was just thinking –” he sat on a chair across Jacques “ – we can always bring the Mercs into this –”

“No!” Jacques said as he stood up “I’m against that! I will not tolerate such a plan! The Mercs are too cruel and cold-blooded to do this!”

“Are you worried about the fact that Elias Vex used to be with your daughter or the fact that they might accidentally kill her?” Snape said irritably

Jacques didn’t speak... he gripped on the chair he was sitting on... he looked lost.

“Be reasonable, Jacques” said Snape “Your daughter is probably out there, in the dark, being raped, molested or even –“

“STOP right there there, Severus!” Jacques bellowed at him. It was glad they were the only ones in the Situation Chamber.

Snape then made a satisfying grin. Did he finally hit the spot?

Jacques started twiddling his thumbs...

“What’s the nearest town from Moredread Mire?” Jacques asked

“Based on Hamilton’s reports... Manem, the Edge of the Kingdom town of Manem” said Snape. The direction of the conversation was already back at hand.

“I – I want –“ he then closed his eyes and muttered something like “I can’t believe I’m doing this... I’m sorry, Hermione...” and finally said “I want to get Drake Reynalds on the phone, now”

Snape’s lips curled to a nasty smile.

“Perfect, Jacques... I’ll get the Merc leader in a private line right away.”

Snape then left the room and Jacques to his lost thoughts.

- - -

In the town of Manem, inside Windsor Inn, the café was bustling with happiness while Fenri and Rapticon Sr. started singing more songs of distant lands and adventures. Harry and Hermione finally joined them awhile after. In the midst of it all, away from the café and across the foyer, inside the living room, Kathy Silverwater was sitting on the couch facing directly at the café room where everyone was laughing and being happy.

She looked at Harry... then to Hermione... then to Ron, Rapticon Sr., Fenrir, Yumi and Moco...

And in one final moment of seeing all of her new arrivals, she gave all of them dead cold stares.

"Don't get involved." he said in her mind.

Chapter Fifteen

The Mercs

Kathy Silverwalker woke up from her sleep. She gazed onto the ceiling above her and sighed. It's been a day since she saw the Moredread Mire survivors and it's been bothering all day that things are going to get bizarre in the next few hours... can she do this?

"Don't get involved." The voice kept playing her head all night... he told her specifically to not get too involved at the moment since it will jeopardize everything. She couldn't get the feeling of dread on her chest... her family is on the line here.

"I swear, We'll make sure your family will be safe" played the voice again in her head "Otherwise, they will die."

She turned on her side and looked at the curtained windows. Was she really going to go through this?

"Can I?" she whispered to herself.

Kathy stood up and opened the curtains to see the busy town of Manem. She looked at her clock seeing that it was eight in the morning.

Mom... dad...

She closed her eyes. It's been a week since they arrived here and threatened them. Just because her mother got someone in the uppers of Manem on the wrong side brought the deadly group of the Mercs into their lives. Why are people so immature now? Can't people fight for themselves? Why bring a back-up to fight their dirty work?

Now I'm living in false livelihood... can it get any worse?

It could... she hasn't seen her mother and father in a week. It's been haunting her whether she will see them again... oh how she hopes she can get back at the Mercs for getting them and telling her that

she will not see them until a special “calling” might make them reconsider their decisions.

False livelihood...

Ever since her parents disappeared, the people who hired the Mercs threatened her that if she contacted anyone about this, they will tell the Mercs to rid of her parents’ misery.

Ms. DeGroot, the middle-aged lady at the lobby was sent by the people who hired the Mercs, was working in Windsor Inn to keep an eye on Kathy just to make sure she doesn’t do anything rash... only last night, DeGroot gave Kathy the cryptic message:

“Your father and mother are at the marketplace getting supplies for the restaurant.”

Which meant one thing... the Mercs wants a word with her.

It’s been a shock for her to find out who fell from the sky last night... Hermione Grangeré, the famous daughter of Biestavale’s most decorated and celebrated general. Why didn’t she recognize her?

The Mercs didn’t give her specifics but told her the plan since the Mercs need the new arrivals in her family’s inn.

Kathy wasn’t interested to backstab people since she isn’t that kind of person but after a few talking and a near-heated argument, the Mercs told her one thing that could change the tide of her life in a long, long time.

“In exchange of your new arrivals, we will give your parents’ and family’s freedom back without question.”

The news was almost mind-rambling for her... but why is she worried? Shouldn’t she be happy about this? Freedom from the mercy of the Mercs! She frowned and remembered how the small gathering last night went... they were all happy and fond of finally being away from the wreck of Moredread Mire... and she will be the one to take that all away from them.

It's all going to change now... today. Kathy turned on her heel and remembered his words...

"Don't get involved" played the voice in her head.

She looked outside of the window and saw the Moogle named Moco fluttering his purple wings looking happy. She wondered where the others were... Windsor Inn has been her home since she was born... she never imagined living inside it in the darkest of her days.

"Time to get to work," she muttered and went to take a shower. Kathy can't imagine how the day will end... but no matter what happens she'll probably end up being a happy or sad panda.

- - -

"What brings the gang in, doc?" Fenrir asked Rapticon Sr. as he came inside the foyer

"Skyld," said Rapticon Sr. "Come, everyone's waiting in my room" he added quietly

"What's with the secrecy - ?"

"Shhh!" Rapticon Sr. shushed "Just follow me"

Rapticon Sr. and Fenrir climbed the stairs and to the room of Rapticon Sr. In there, Harry, Hermione, Ron, Yumi and Moco idly waited for them.

"Someone's gonna tell me what's goin' on?" Fenrir said as he sat on the bed Hermione was sitting on.

"Skyld," said Rapticon Sr. closing the door "and something else..."

Rapticon Sr. sighed.

"Fenrir, Yumi, Moco... we owe you an explanation"

“Oh do we!” said Fenrir “I’m all ears”

“Alright... err... -“ Rapticon Sr. scratched his head “Where should I start? ...Harry?”

Harry shot a look at Rapticon Sr.

“Care to take first blood?” Rapticon Sr. gestured to Yumi, Moco and Fenrir.

Harry nodded. He stood up and cleared his throat.

“Um... - er... you do all know what happened yesterday, right?” Harry said

“You kidnapped princess here and went on to a wild ride down the swamp of mistery, of course we knew what happened” said Fenrir
“We just don’t know why”

“Well,” Harry said “The king is dead – which you guys know – and he was murdered by Scipio, his own adviser. The murder was planned out by Snape”

“But why?” Moco asked desperately “Did he plan the murder of the king out of personal gain, kupo?”

“That’s what we think he’s doing,” said Hermione quietly “You see, he was keen to kidnap me in the process...”

“Kidnap you?” Fenrir asked his eyes widening “For what?”

Hermione, Harry, Ron and Rapticon Sr. exchanged looks.

“W-What’s wrong?” Yumi asked “They kidnapped Hermione for what? Because she’s the general’s daughter?”

“No,” Hermione said, standing up

“Hermione, are you sure you want to tell them?” Rapticon Sr. asked

Hermione didn't say anything but she just nodded. She turned to Yumi –

“Snape – “ blinked and started to stammer “t-trying to – well – kidnap me because – er...” she looked at Harry who nodded for support “Because... he knows that I am something special”

“Which means...?” Fenrir raised his eyebrows

Harry caught a glimpse of Hermione's face... she was biting her lower lip.

“I – I” she took a deep breath “I am a...”

“A what?” Moco asked

“...a Summoner.” Hermione finally said.

There was a long pause but was broken by Fenrir who made a slow laugh.

“You're kidding me, right?” Fenrir croaked “Y-You can't say that and expect us to believe it!”

“That's the point,” Hermione said bravely “I am not”

“B-but that's so kupo!” Moco said his wings flapping wildly “I-It can't be possible! Summoners are extinct!”

“Then you read it wrong” Rapticon Sr. said

“How are you sure that she's telling the truth then?” Yumi demanded

“Because she didn't tell us!” Harry loudly said. Everyone was looking at Harry. “She didn't admit it to us because Snape spoiled it for us through a crystal –“

“Woah wait –“ said Yumi “We're talking about the crystals, right? As in the ones that can hold up memories of the past?”

“Yep,” said Ron

“Anyway –“ Harry continued “He showed it to us, and what we saw is proof that she is one – she was almost a victim of the ones who want to chuck out Summoners!”

There was a long silence. Harry and Hermione exchanged looks and Hermione mouthed a furtive thank you to Harry.

“Heh...” Fenrir snorted “I grew up to know that a crystal never lies – which is true –“ he added before anyone could interrupt “Looks like your story makes sense to me now, doc”

“It’s not only that –“ Hermione said “We believe that Snape is working for someone big... someone who wants me”

“Who wouldn’t want you?” Fenrir said “Cuz the last time Summoners were seen around in public was a long time ago”

“I know.” Hermione said “Look... I don’t really mind if you believe me or not but I swear – I don’t want to talk about it”

“Being a Summoner, kupo?” Moco looked at her

“Yes, Moco” she replied “There – there are some things I don’t want to remember because of it”

“Does this have anything to do with our trip to Skyld?” Fenrir asked “Ya know, the Summoner thing?”

“That’s a different story,” Rapticon Sr. said “You see, the Archmage of Skyld has something we need –“

“Whatever it is, it must be an airship” Fenrir interjected “You owe me”

“I know, Fenrir” said Rapticon Sr. “But seriously, we just need to meet him”

“Care to tell us why?”

“You mean ‘you’” Yumi pointed out wryly “We know why”

“Looks like I’m the unknowledgeable one” Fenrir made a toothless grin

“I have to admit,” Rapticon Sr. said chuckling the “The news will be utter bull for you”

“Try me,” said Fenrir “Your Summoner story is believable enough, you probably have something less shocking than – HEY!”

Yumi caught Fenrir by the collar and whispered him in the ear. His face turned from wonder to shock.

“Son of a bitch –“ he muttered as Yumi stopped whispering. He looked at Rapticon Sr. “Is this a nut house or something?!”

“No, it’s not” said Rapticon Sr. “We suggest you just keep your thoughts to yourself and cooperate with us”

“Well duh!” Fenrir said in a disbelief tone “I just got dragged in by two kids, a bangaa look-a-like, a ninja, a Moogles and a human target to a situation that is big than I’ve heard so far! I can’t walk away from that! I’m involved now”

“Precisely.” Rapticon Sr. smirked “Accula knows what we’re talking about –“

“Yeah, as if he’ll believe your out of this world story”

“Not really, since he is one.” Harry said

Fenrir opened his mouth, thought for a second and closed his mouth.

“Then looks like I’ll be stuck with you until I get a new ship then” he leered at Rapticon Sr.

“If you wanna know” said Yumi “We believe them – it’s farfetched but c’mon, they kidnapped the general’s daughter... no one’s that stupid, right?”

“C-Can we just cut to the chase here?!” Fenrir said in a tone of conclusive panic “Okay, Ginger here is a Summoner, I believe ya, you guys are not –“ he rolled his eyes “- part of this world... we’re going to Skyld to meet the Archmage... the question is, how can you do that when the whole kingdom is after ya?”

This is a question that struck the party. How were they going to go to Skyld with the being on the run from the kingdom?

“We go now before news reaches Manem, I guess” said Yumi “this place hardly knows what happens inside the city until the whole city is informed”

“Yeah,” said Rapticon Sr. “I checked the papers, not one pinch of information of yesterday’s events has been reported. I bet wanted posters will be posted later today so I suggest we move now.”

“How can we move with Hermione?” Yumi asked “Her name isn’t something to pass by on – she’s famous”

“You’re right” Rapticon Sr. rubbed his chin

“Change her name” said Fenrir at once

Harry remembered Fenrir’s suggestion last night on changing Hermione’s name for the time being.

“I – I can live with that...” Hermione nodded

“That’s great,” said Rapticon Sr. “What moniker will you go under as?”

Hermione thought for a while. Harry wanted to say some suggestions but he thought best to keep quiet.

“Harriet.” Hermione finally said and gave a significant look to Harry.

“Why Harriet?” Ron asked curiously

“It’s a female version of Harry” Rapticon Sr. said in an off-hand tone and smirked.

Harry then got Hermione’s significant look and smiled at her. Hermione smiled at him and said

“So... how do we get out of here?”

“There’s an air cab depot somewhere around here,” said Fenrir jerking his head to the side “It leads to everywhere near Manem... Skyld is one of ‘em”

“That settles it then...” Hermione sighed “I hope we’ll all be okay in the end...”

A brief silence followed after this. Harry surveyed his companions; Ron was twiddling the guideline cards, Rapticon Sr. was making furtive checks outside of the window... the silence broke when Yumi said

“But if you’re a Summoner...” she looked at Hermione awkwardly “Then there’s a high chance that you would want to be used for the war – doesn’t it scare you?”

“As long as no one knows about it” Harry said “She’ll be fine... right, Hermione?”

Hermione gave Harry a worried look.

“Snape knows, Harry...” she said “I doubt he’ll tell the kingdom because he wants me for his superior... I – I just don’t want to be –”

“You won’t” Harry said, standing up and approached towards her “As long as you’re with us, you’ll be alright” he looked around “Right, guys?”

He gave Ron a look asking for support. Ron cleared his throat and nodded.

“I’m not leaving your side, Hermy” he made his usual smirk

“As your professor in Hogwarts,” said Rapticon Sr. “I swore the school’s professor oath that in times of danger of a student, I shall protect them till the end” he smiled

Hermione looked at Yumi, Fenrir and Moco.

“Kupo! Breeding Chocobos has been a challenge for me so why not take up Summoner guarding? I’m in for it, kupo!” Moco jumped happily

“You can count me in!” Yumi stood up and raised her hand in the air “it is an honor to be in your presence, Milady!” she bowed before Hermione

“Please...” Hermione blushed “There’s no need to be formal”

“Ha!” Yumi said hopping to stand straight “Go it, Harriet” she winked

Fenrir then stood from his seat.

“I ain’t admitting total fellowship here, princess – which I’m aware that it looks like I’m doing it –” he added looking at a sniggering Rapticon Sr. “But hey,” he made a smug grin “I’ll be in for the ride but I need to get one thing straight...” he then turned to Rapticon Sr. “When will I get my damn new airship!?”

“Soon enough,” said Rapticon Sr. laughing, then he looked at his wristwatch “C’mon, Kathy promised she’ll give us a little tour around the town. That way, we can find the airship cab depot”

“Really?” Ron asked with the air of fancy “S-she’s going to give us a tour around the town?”

“Yeah...” Rapticon Sr. looked at Ron peculiarly “She’s going to accompany us to the marketplace where we can get supplies for the trip”

“Oh, I see” Ron said

Harry saw Ron give a furtive smirk at the sound of this news. Harry laughed at the thought of Ron’s sudden joy.

“Are we going or not?” Fenrir said stroking his hair

- - -

The marketplace of Manem is known to be quite busy. Harry and company weaved in and out within the crowd following a very animated Kathy who was giving them information by the minute.

“Manem sells lots and lots of stuff over here, we are the biggest producers of poultry in the kingdom, don’t you know?”

“Amazing, I never knew that” Ron said enthusiastically who was near Kathy the whole time. For the first time in a while, Ron has taken up for himself to interact with the people in F.F.O.

“Is carrot-top just playing kiss up or is he just happy to see her?” Fenrir muttered to Harry

“I’m not sure,” Harry chuckled as he moved through the crowd “As long as he’s happy”

“Heh, I can’t even get myself one –“ Fenrir said and took out a walkie-talkie out of his jacket pocket “You know how to use this, right?”

Harry didn’t answer, due to living with the Dursley’s he has never ever held a walkie-talkie in his entire life but that fact alone doesn’t mean he doesn’t know how to use them.

“Of course – where did you get it?”

“Salvaged it at the wreckage of the crash back at Moredread” said Fenrir “thought it might come in handy” he turned the knob making the radio crackle to life “Still works.”

“I reckon you let Rapticon Sr. hold that” Harry said “It feels right”

“Yeah, yeah” said Fenrir as he walked away towards Rapticon Sr.

“Do I really have to put my hood up the whole time?” Hermione asked irritably “I feel weird”

“Your face is probably famous here” said Yumi “We can’t take any risks, ya know?”

Hermione just scoffed and remained the silent.

“By the way, what are we going to do with Fenrir’s Moogles and the Chocobos?” asked Hermione

“Fenrir said he’ll leave them here to settle in Manem, kupo” Moco answered as he fluttered above them and landed on Harry’s shoulder “As for the Chocobos, they’ll stay here except for Choco, he’s mine and I can’t go away without him, kupo!”

“Kweh!” screeched Choco from behind

“Hey! Don’t trail behind, kupo!” Moco said as he pulled Choco’s reigns forward and fluttered on Choco’s head “Harry, help!”

Harry chuckled and helped Moco pull Choco along with them.

“Ah! Here we are!” said Rapticon Sr. in front of them. Everyone craned their heads to get a better look on their first stop at the marketplace “Stock up on some supplies kids, we’re going for an adventure!”

They left the store with Choco’s saddlebags heavier than before. Hermione was counting what’s left of her money.

"I don't know how you have that much money but I thanks" Hermione said to Rapticon Sr.

"No prob," he replied "I just found 'em in my pocket when I got here"

"You mean when you fell in this world?"

"Yep, believe it or not"

The party reached at the center of the marketplace where a large circular fountain graced the area. Children played around the fountain while citizens sat on the edges of the fountain throwing their gil hoping for luck. A dove sat quietly on the statue of a knight that stood in the center of the fountain.

"So, Kathy" Ron said "You've been living here ever since you were a child?"

"Yep, since day one" Kathy smirked "How about you?"

Harry saw Ron fumble his fingers furtively behind his back.

"I – er – live in the city of Biestavale... yeah, nothing much, I just live there – haha..." he chuckled nervously

"Oh," Kathy looked at the sky "I've been to the city... only once though but that was a long time ago. What's it like now?"

"It's bloody brilliant," Ron exclaimed "You have to see the number of people in it! It's quite large on foot but you'll get used to it as the days pass by..."

"I think Ron likes someone" Yumi teased quietly in a sing-song voice.

"Jealous, are you?" Hermione suddenly said which made Harry shoot her with a glance of surprise.

"Me? No!" Yumi explained waving a hand "He's not my type... he's good looking but nah, I rather have someone else"

“Care to share on that?” Hermione asked in a halfhearted challenging tone while she smiled

“Ummm... I’m not really comfortable answering that question, Harriet” Yumi winced

Harry grabbed Hermione by the arm before she could say anything

“What’s wrong with you?” he said quietly “You have a problem with Yumi?”

“Nope” Hermione said simply and sighed “Sorry, I just want to get to know everyone...”

“Well, don’t do it in an assertive way, no one is hiding anything... I think” Harry scratched his head.

Hermione sighed... she remembered her sudden jealousy of how close Yumi and Harry were...

“How much do you and Yumi know each other?” Hermione asked

“I know her a lot now...” Harry said “We’ve been talking a lot”

“Ah, I see...” she made a furtive frown

“Why?”

“N-Nothing... just wondering that’s all” she then made a chuckle and went silent.

The party had a pleasant time resting at the fountain sitting on the edge. Fenrir bought everyone hotdogs while Kathy told them stories about Manem (with Ron listening intently to Harry’s amusement). Harry noticed Rapticon Sr. checking his watch often, he must be waiting for the right time to leave for Skyld.

“When are we going to fly to Skyld?” Hermione asked Harry

“I’m not sure, Harriet” Harry replied with a grin

Hermione made a mock laugh and turned to her hotdog.

BANG!

Harry jumped at the loud sound of a gunshot. Everyone in the marketplace screamed and started looking around wondering where the gunshot came from. Harry ducked behind the fountain's low wall together with the rest of his companions.

"Hermione, are you okay?" Harry asked

"Yeah –" she shifted and took a peek over the fountain. "Did you hear that - ?"

BANG!

The second shot brought the crowd to an uproar since they started screaming and running across the marketplace.

"Who in the damn hell is shooting?" Fenrir growled from Harry's far right as the crowd in the marketplace started to disperse.

Unexpectedly, the voice of a woman spoke behind them.

"The sniper on the roof, can't you see him?"

The party jumped to their feet at the sight of their new arrival. Harry instantly recognized her... Julia Blumetritt, one of the Mercs.

"Julia!" Hermione gasped

She didn't wear her dress back at the banquet two nights ago, she instead wore a black coat that was under a grey turtle neck. Her slacks graced her legs. Harry noticed a red triangle with a letter M on it placed at the side of her slacks... this must be their symbol. He couldn't help but notice how pretty looked.

"Hey, hey, Hermione" Julia said calmly as she walked towards them "I've been wondering when we'll find you!"

Ron summoned his spear and raised it but was cut off by Julia.

“Na-ah-ah-ah” she waved a finger “We got you pinned down for the time being, my dear fugitives” she started walking again towards them “You see, one of Merc members has got his iron sights marked on you guys... except for Hermione” she took out a cellphone and dialed a few numbers and started talking to someone “Drake, we got them... shall we proceed with the plan?”

Rapticon Sr. glanced at Kathy who was looking beside herself. She was breathing heavily and her lower lip started to make involuntary movements.

“Did... did my father sent you?” Hermione asked keenly

“Why yes, dear” said Julia “Who else would send the elite mercenary group for your rescue?”

“Julia, you don’t understand” Hermione said slowly “I am not safe there!”

“Tut, tut, tut...” Julia shook her head and leered to Harry “Did you do anything to her?”

“N-No, I didn’t!” Harry retorted back “You have no idea what we’re doing here! If someone will only listen to us –“

“We get it,” said the voice of Elias Vex as he entered the marketplace from the right “You killed the king, kidnapped Hermione for your own agenda I don’t really care about!” he said all of this in a smug manner as he dragged a long double-bladed sword. He too was wearing the same attire as Julia.

“Vex” Hermione scowled at him

“Grangeré” Elias smirked “I thought we’d never see each other again! I was so worried –“

“Stick your words back into your trap, Vex” Hermione snarled

“Oho!” Elias raised his hands in a mocking manner “You do realize I’m here to save you, right? C’mom geez” he scratched the back of his head “I’ve been a pain in the ass but I never knew you’d still see me that way when I’m rescuing you!”

“That’s not the point!” Hermione said “You’re after the wrong people!”

“This is going to be hard...” Julia placed a hand on her forehead “We were ordered by your father to get you back... as for the fugitives, he says that we can either leave them for dead or bring them back alive”

“That’s crazy talk, rosie” Fenrir said, his rifle aimed at Elias

“A man with a smart mouth” Julia said coolly “Not the first time I’ve seen one, though”

“Humor me,” Elias rolled his eyes at Julia

“What did you say?” she shot a deadly look to Elias

“I mean – no more for me - the smart mouth, ya know?” he said quickly

Julia scoffed at Elias and turned to the party.

“Before we go into basic action, we would like to thank our little accomplice in tipping us off –“

“Tipped us off?” Harry furrowed his brow “Who?”

“Save us the trouble, Merc” Rapticon Sr. suddenly spat stepping forward “You want Hermione? Go through us!”

“What?!” Yumi cried “Are you talking about fighting with a Merc?!”

“That’s so kupo!” Moco bounced on Choco’s back

“You made a promise, remember?!” Ron reminded them indignantly

Yumi and Moco winced when they were reminded by this and nodded.

“Are ya sure about this?” Fenrir muttered to Rapticon Sr. “We have no idea how many Mercs are present right now... let alone how many snipers are up there”

“You still got the other walkie-talkie?” Rapticon Sr. said

“Yep,” Fenrir said

“Look... take Hermione, Ron and Yumi and run for it on Choco... I’ll take Harry, Kathy and Moco. We split up and lose ‘em”

“Sorry to bring this up, doc but I don’t think we can make a run for it” growled Fenrir “We are facing an elite group of damn hitmen hear!”

Rapticon Sr. rubbed his chin... they didn’t have any time to think! He looked at Kathy then Hermione and sighed.

“Hermione?”

“What?”

“I hate to ask you again but –“

“You want me to make a shield for you, right?” she winced

“I’m sorry...” Rapticon Sr. blinked “It’s essential if we want to get out of here –“

“This is getting crazy!” Elias complained “That’s it, I’m engaging battle!”

“Elias no!” Julia yelled as Elias went to a battle pose “We can’t risk anything!”

Elias ignored Julia, he went to a crouching position and ran for the party. In an instant, Rapticon Sr. grabbed Hermione, snatched Fenrir’s rifle and aimed it under her chin forcing Elias to stop.

“Wait!” Julia called out

“Go further and she’ll lose a jaw!” Rapticon Sr. yelled

“Are you nuts?!” Fenrir yelled

“Get down, all of you!” Rapticon Sr. screamed “NOW!”

The party went into prone position. Harry was both worried and perplexed at what Rapticon Sr. wants to accomplish... he’s aiming a gun at Hermione!

“We’re not stupid!” Julia called “If you wanted to use Hermione as a ticket out of here you would’ve hurt her by now –“

Click!

Rapticon Sr. armed the rifle. Hermione shivered under Rapticon Sr.’s mercy.

“It’s alright, I won’t literally hurt you” Rapticon Sr. whispered

“I know” Hermione trembled “I just don’t know how far you’ll try to convince them”

“I’ll do anything under my power to protect you, alright?” Rapticon Sr. said “In the count of three, I want you to produce at least two shields for us... one for Fenrir’s side which you’ll be going with –“

“How about you?” Hermione said

“I got business with Kathy” Rapticon Sr. said

“You think she’s the mole?” Hermione gasped

“I’m not sure” Rapticon Sr. said “Ready?”

“I – I think so... I can do it”

“We don’t got time for this!” Julia said as she got her cellphone “Ickis, take out the one who’s taking Hermione hostage!”

“Which one, Jules?” replied Ickis in the cellphone “They’re all taking her hostage”

“The orange one” she said sternly

“Got it...” said the voice of the sniper

Meanwhile, Ron and Harry who were down at the ground were in conversation.

“How are we going to get out of this?” Ron said “We’re sure to be arrested!”

“Shhh, Ron! I’m trying to think!” Harry said. His head hurts from all the thinking.

Rapticon Sr. in the other hand, whispered to Hermione.

“Fenrir’s ready... in the count of three now... one – two –“

BANG!

“Argh!” Yumi and Moco screamed but instead of a sickening squish of a bullet meeting a head, there was a loud “clang!”

“Wha –?” Ron looked up

There was a large barrier with hexagonal shapes around them. The party stood up and saw Hermione raising her hands in the air while glowing in white light.

“Hermione - ?” Harry gasped

“Don’t’ worry, she’s fine” Rapticon Sr. said “Quick! She’ll provide two shields, Ron, Yumi – go with Fenrir – I’ll take Moco, Harry and Kathy –“

“But – “ Ron butted in

“I’ll explain everything later!” Rapticon Sr. shouted “Get on Choco and we’ll meet each other somewhere! NOW NOW NOW!”

“Get them!” shouted Julia

Through the barrier, Harry recognized the Asian Merc Shen-Ku Yu, and saw a new Merc who Harry hasn’t recognized yet, a fairly large man with a heavy-looking hammer.

“That’s Nero Simmons, kupo” Moco squeaked

“Nero who?” Ron shot an eyebrow up

“A Merc” Fenrir said “C’mon!”

Harry ran to Rapticon Sr. who released his grip from Hermione.

“Hermione!” Harry said “Go to Fenrir now!”

Hermione looked at Harry. Harry felt a bit of shiver down his spine when he saw Hermione’s eyes glow white.

“I’ll be fine, okay?” Harry assured her “Now go!”

Hermione nodded and with quick succession, she dropped her arms, created another shield barrier and placed it on Fenrir, Ron, Yumi and Choco.

“Run!” Hermione said as she ran inside the newly formed shield.

Harry looked at Hermione again and mouthed her that we’ll be okay.

“The shields out on the Potter boy!” Elias snapped at Julia

Bang!

Harry, Kathy and Rapticon Sr. ducked as the bullet zipped passed them nearly hitting Elias at the feet.

“Hey! I’m your ally here!!” he complained

“HERMIONE!” Rapticon Sr. bellowed

Cue to this, a shield formed around Harry, Kathy, Moco and Rapticon Sr. before Ickis, the sniper of the Mercs could take another shot.

“Run here!” Rapticon Sr. yelled as he lead the two teenagers to the west side of the marketplace.

“GET THEM!” yelled Julia Blumetritt

Harry looked behind him and saw the shielded Choco run at the opposite direction. He hoped that they’ll meet each other safely.

“Are you sure about this?” Kathy said as they ran to a new road to the left

“I’m sure about this” Rapticon Sr. said “We’ll figure something out – WOAHH!”

A ball of flame erupted in front of them as their shield dispersed to nothingness.

“It’s Shen!” Harry said looking back as the Asian Merc ran towards them

“Kupo!” Moco squealed

“Stay back!” Rapticon Sr. yelled and raised his arms forward “FIRE!”

A jet of flames erupted to the side of the road causing a scaffolding of a constructed building to fall in front of them. The crowd ran away from them as Shen-Ku Yu swore in the distance.

“This way!” Rapticon Sr. shouted leading them to an alley and to a new street.

“Everyone is nuts right now,” Harry gasped as he tried to catch breath

“Manem is usually a peaceful town” Kathy panted trying to keep up with Harry and Rapticon Sr. “There is no way they’d see this coming!”

“Wait!” Rapticon Sr. said raising his hand to halt the three “We lost them!” he then dragged Harry, Moco and Kathy behind a fruit stand. “We’ll be safe here...”

Harry peeked and saw many citizens running away from the marketplace... where is Hermione and the others? Are they alright? His question will finally be answered when Harry he heard Rapticon Sr. behind him talking to the walkie-talkie Fenrir gave him.

“Fenrir?” Rapticon Sr. spoke to the radio “Are you there? Do you copy?”

There was no answer... Harry crossed his fingers.

Please let them be alright... please let my friends be safe...

“Oh my, kupo” Moco said quietly “I – I hope Choco is okay!”

Harry frowned in guilt to Moco... he really loved Choco and was Moco’s best friend Chocobo.

“Fenrir? Hello? Do you copy!?”

Kzzt!

“We’re safe and sound, doc” panted the voice of Fenrir from the radio

Harry’s heart leapt. He went near the walkie-talkie to hear out everything.

“That’s good, that’s good...” Rapticon Sr. said panting “How are the kids?”

“Oh they’re fine!” Fenrir said in the air of slight annoyance but heavy satisfaction “So... what happens next?”

Rapticon Sr. took the radio to his mouth.

“I’ll talk with Kathy first...” Rapticon Sr. said “Stay under the radar... I’ll be back in a few minutes”

“Got it.” Fenrir said before going dark

“Why are you going to talk to Kathy?” Harry asked as Rapticon Sr. pocketed the walkie-talkie

“Because...” he said quietly “I think she tipped them off about us”

“What?! – why?” Harry shot a look at Kathy feeling deceived

“Shhhh!” Rapticon Sr. shushed “I have yet to ask, Harry! Just wait for a moment –“

Rapticon Sr. scooted over to Kathy.

“Kathy?” Rapticon Sr. asked “I know it’s a hard time right now but Harry and I must know the truth –“

Kathy looked at Rapticon Sr. and to Harry who was looking at her defiantly.

“Kathy...” Rapticon Sr. said again “Did you lead the Mercs to us?”

Harry saw Kathy look at Rapticon Sr. and with a small gulp and a few fumbling with her fingers, she nodded. For some reason, Harry wanted to stand up and kick her... how could she?

“You betrayed us, kupo?!” Moco fiercely said “I can’t believe this kupo shenanigans I’m hearing, kupo!”

“Calm down!” Rapticon Sr. said loudly and he turned to Kathy “Why?”

As if this was some kind of orchestrated conversation, Kathy spoke quickly.

“T-the Mercs have my parents in custody!” she cried “and if I hand you in, the-they will let us off the hook”

A tinge of pity swelled inside Harry. He looked into Kathy’s tired eyes... her family under the mercy of the Mercs? His anger towards her started to ebb away after knowing this new revelation.

“Dammit,” Rapticon Sr. swore “I’ll go easy on you, Kathy but –“

“Look – I know what I did, okay?!” Kathy cried while tears fell from her eyes “I – I was just confused and lost I – I didn’t know what will happen, okay? I just want my mom and dad again! I don’t want to get orphaned! They’ll kill them if I don’t turn you in!”

The guilt inside Harry bubbled further... the feeling of being orphaned is such a painful feeling. Allowing someone else to feel his pain by sacrificing her parents for his own personal gain is just wrong for him.

“Fenrir?” Rapticon Sr. spoke to the radio

“Yeah? We’re alright, a few of ‘em passed by... none of them saw us” said Fenrir

“Good –“ Rapticon Sr. said distractedly “Hey, we have a new problem now”

“Eh? What’s that?”

“Kathy” Rapticon Sr. said

There was a slight pause and Fenrir replied

“Lemme guess... she’s the rat in the pack?”

“Yes...” Rapticon Sr. nodded

“Goddammit” Fenrir quietly swore “We shouldn’t have been so blind –
“

“Take it easy, Fenrir” Rapticon Sr. ordered “We’ll get out of this mess because I have a plan –“ he turned to Kathy significantly “- and I need you to listen because any moment now, the Mercs will find us and kill us so please, understand what I’m trying to say, alright?”

Harry was getting confused, how will they get out of this mess? The Mercs are probably calling Snape now bringing him in for the kill.

“What’s the plan now, doc?” Fenrir asked darkly

Rapticon Sr. looked at the sky and said

“I’ll figure something out... but I need Hermione now.”

“You can’t go on with the exchange!” Harry surprisingly said “You just can’t!”

“Harry – stay out of this, please!” Rapticon Sr. said

“Stay out of this? You’re talking about giving Hermione up to the Snape! We can’t give up now for some –“ he gestured to Kathy “ – person we just met!”

“Be empathetic, Harry” Rapticon Sr. said “We’ve got no other choice!”

“Guys? Are you still there?” Fenrir’s voice cackled in the radio

“We’re till here, Fenrir... standby” said Rapticon Sr. “Just trust me in this one, alright?”

Harry stood there in disbelief... they can’t just give up now, not when they’re this far...

“Doc... I heard something about you needing Hermione?” said Fenrir

Rapticon Sr. raised the radio to his lips.

“Where are you guys?”

“Near Windsor Inn behind that blue café a block from it” said Fenrir

“I’ll meet you there... I need Hermione now” said Rapticon Sr. “I think we can do something about our problem.”

Harry shook his head and stared at the ground in disbelief and shock.

- - -

For the day where The Mercs were tipped off of their target, only five were assigned to extract Hermione. They thought they had the upper-hand with Kathy under their mercy. But things have been backfired recently that they had no idea how it happened. It’s been almost an hour since the incident in the marketplace.

“Did we lose them?”

Julia, who was pressing her cellphone against her forehead, looked up to meet the eyes of Ickis James, the head assassin of the Mercs. He was tall, covered most of his face with a large fedora and carried a sniper rifle around his arms.

“You missed” she retorted back

“Woah, woah, woah...” Ickis said “That wasn’t a jab at what happened awhile ago, I was just askin”

“Never mind that, Ickis” said Julia “Drake trusted me to get the job done and if he finds out I let a bunch of fugitives go away with Hermione, I don’t think I’ll be heading Mercs operations in a long while!”

“Calm down, Jules” said Ickis calmly leaning on a fruit crate “They’re bound to find them soon, they can’t go anywhere”

“How are you so sure?”

“Because... we have Silverwalker’s parents, I bet they won’t leave until they’re safe – goodie-two-shoes if I ever say so myself”

For once, Ickis made sense... Julia thought about it and sighed.

"I just need to know where they are!" she clenched her fist

"Be careful." Ickis said as he took an apple from the fruit stands "You might break something"

"Shut up," said Julia

"Sure" Ickis chomped on an apple easily

Ring!

Julia felt the phone vibrate in her hands. She flipped the phone open and spoke to it.

"Blumetritt, anything new?"

"We got them!" breathed Nero's voice "We found the orange guy!"

"You did?" Julia said triumphantly "Well done, Nero!"

"We saw him sneaking around the intersection of 5th Street and 3rd Street" said the voice of Elias "Kathy is here too"

"And Hermione?" Julia breathed

"The fugitives claim they have her but they'll only cooperate if we fulfill our promise to Kathy... Jules, she must've caved in the last minute" said Elias

"We'll work it out, Elias" Jules said "Just bring him and Kathy here"

"Looks like things are lookin' up for ya" Ickis chuckled throwing the apple core away

"I know" said Julia smiling "I have to report this to Drake now"

"Do it later," said Ickis "The boss doesn't need his lackeys to disturb him every now and then especially when he's busy at this hour"

"You're probably right." Julia said putting the phone in her pocket... she looked at Ickis suddenly "Where are the parents of Kathy?"

"They're at the truck" Ickis thumbed the alleyway where a black truck was parked. "You could've picked a better parking spot, to be quite honest"

"Doesn't matter," Julia waved a hand at him lazily "There they are"

Ickis and Julia saw Shen, Elias and Nero coming in the marketplace square holding Rapticon Sr. by the arms, while Shen kept Kathy ensnared within his grasp.

"On his knees," snapped Julia "Now"

Elias and Nero pushed Rapticon Sr. on his knees. Julia walked towards Rapticon Sr.

"So you're one of the war heroes of Operation: Ibarra two days ago!" she said proudly as she circled him "Rapticon Sr...." she laughed "My, my, my do we have lots of trouble to fix, don't we?"

Rapticon Sr. didn't answer. He just looked at them defiantly.

"Ah Kathy," said Julia "How are you?"

Kathy too didn't answer and instead she frowned and started staring at her shoes.

"Your parents are waiting for you, you know?" Julia said kindly to Kathy "They're in the truck behind me" she gestured to the black truck

Kathy's eyes widened with longing and desperation. Rapticon Sr. shook his head out of reverie.

"Kathy told me about your deal... that if you get Hermione, you'll let her go" said Rapticon Sr. "I want to add to that"

"Yes?" Julia looked at him intriguingly

“I want you to take me and Hermione in exchange of Kathy’s parents and clearance of the charges against my companions –“

“Not so fast,” said Elias slyly “You see, we didn’t come here for Hermione alone. We came to get the fugitives who killed the late King Bedeviere!”

Rapticon Sr. didn’t show any sign of weakness. He was ready to give it all up... somehow...

“Our orders,” said Julia “was to get Hermione only... Sir Severus Snape will be arriving shortly to restrain the fugitives. I hardly see an escape route here anyway” she looked around

“So n-now what?” Rapticon Sr. asked intently “I just want to get my friends off the hook! Will you take Hermione or not?”

“Your courage and sacrifice impresses me, Raptor” said Julia “They should be proud for having a leader like you –“

“Cut to the chase now, Jules!” Ickis said from the back “Monologues is the reason why villains die”

“We are not villains,” Elias corrected Ickis “We just work for the highest bidder and who you are calling us villains, hmmm?” he raised an eyebrow “We’re working to save Hermione!”

“Just sayin’ out of the usual pretenses, Vexy” said Ickis jokingly

“Don’t call me that!” Elias said hysterically

“Ickis?” Rapticon Sr. muttered as he looked at Ickis James.

“So?” Julia said “Where is she?”

“She’s being held up by my friend” said Rapticon Sr. “I have to radio him in to give her to you but not until Kathy and her parents are united and safe”

“Where’s the radio?”

“Right here” Shen said “We confiscated that from him”

“Very well then...” she said “We’ll take your exchange”

She took the radio from Shen and after clicking it open, she placed it on Rapticon Sr.’s ear.

“H-Harry?” Rapticon Sr. panted

“Professor?” Harry replied

“How many times do I have to tell you, Harry? I’m not your professor in this world” he said quickly

“Sorry – what’s happening?” said Harry... Rapticon Sr. never heard Harry’s voice sound so dry and scared.

“They are going with the exchange... I’m coming with them too –“

“What?!” Harry bellowed into his ear which made Rapticon Sr. wince
“Y-you can’t do that!!”

“I have to Harry! Snape and the kingdom will be there shortly I need you to trust me and bring Hermione here! After that, take Kathy and her parents with you to Fenrir, he’ll lead you to Skyld and Accula will be there to help you, understand? I want you to leave now!”

Julia laughed

“That won’t be necessary, Rapticon – “

“SHUT UP, I’M STILL TALKIN’!” Rapticon Sr. yelled at Julia and after clearing his throat he continued “Harry? I know it’s hard for you... but you have to trust me... I swear, I will take care of Hermione, we will see you again –“

“Sir...” Harry’s voice trailed

“Just do it, dammit” Rapticon Sr. said “The Mercs are getting rowdy”

"I'll say" said Elias

"Harry..." Rapticon Sr. said quietly "Bring her out now... I don't want this whole thing to go into a bloodfest... come out now."

- - -

Harry dropped the radio. He can't believe he was asked to do... he looked to his left and saw Hermione sitting on a crate albeit wearing a black bag over her head. Moco was looking at Harry sadly.

"I – I can't do this, Moco" Harry said in a shaky voice "I'm about to give up two people who I need right now"

"Kupo..." Moco said "I don't know what to say..."

"You don't have to say anything" Harry croaked "But promise one thing..."

"What?" Moco looked at Harry

"That when we get to Skyld, we'll come running for Rapticon Sr. and Hermione"

"Yes, kupo!" Moco said punching his palms

"Harry?" Rapticon Sr.'s voice crackled in the radio in his hand "Where are you?"

"I'm coming" said Harry and after stifling a sniff, he went to Hermione.

"Hermione, we have to go now..." he took Hermione by the hand and helped her out of the alleyway and into the marketplace.

"There they are!" Elias yelled from afar

"Don't worry, Hermione..." Harry said sadly "I'll get you back, I promise!"

“Send out the parents of Kathy!” Julia ordered Ickis

Harry helped Hermione towards the cobbled walk. He wished he could just magic themselves out now... he can't do this... not now, not here.

Please... let me wake up... I want to wake up and find myself in Hogwarts...

They were nearing the Mercks. Harry saw Ickis leading two adults who must be Kathy's parents... they looked like they haven't eaten in days. Kathy saw them and started calling out to them.

“Mom! Dad!” she cried

“Kathy!!” the mother cried but Ickis held his rifle up to block their path

Harry stopped on his tracks with Hermione by his side.

“The parents” Harry said, his lip trembling

Julia nodded to Ickis who dropped the gun. She then harshly released Kathy from his grasp. Kathy ran for her mother and father and for the first time in a long time for Harry, the sight of the union between child and parents was something he would long for in his life...

“Now give us Hermione!” Elias yelled

Harry squeezed Hermione's hand... he wanted to make one goodbye but he somehow let go of her and pushed her towards them. He looked on helplessly as Ickis escorted Hermione to the truck.

“Wha – what about Rapticon Sr.?” Harry said in a low voice, he felt helpless “You're going to take him now?”

“Hmmmmmmmm....” Julia put a finger on her lip “Let me think... No.”

And in an instant, Julia pulled out a gun from her holster and shot Rapticon Sr. in the heart three times making Rapticon Sr. fall

backward in a graceful arch. Harry wanted to scream but his mouth was wide open that all he could do was say “NOOOOOOOOO!!!!”

The lifeless body of Rapticon Sr. lay motionless on the spot, his eyes closed...Harry couldn't speak. He just looked on in shock seeing the death of his professor in front of him!

It can't be...!

“Leave him alone,” said Julia “Sir Severus Snape will take care of him. Come, we have to bring back someone's daughter back to him”

Julia and the Mercs left Harry and his mourning at peace as they climbed in the truck. Harry felt the anger boil in him. He stood up and was about to attack when...

BANG!

Harry ducked and saw Ickis aiming his rifle at him.

“If you plan to attack, we'll kill the parents instead” said Ickis coolly gesturing to Kathy and her parents who were still in shock at the abrupt death.

Harry's mind was racing... he didn't care, all he wanted was to kill the Mercs and save Hermione... he can't believe his stupidity...

Ickis boarded the truck from the back and with the sound of a truck sweeping out of the alley, they disappeared in sight.

Harry kneeled and started banging on the surface. He can't believe he lost not only Hermione but Rapticon Sr. This can't be happening... it's too real...

“I – I'm sorry, Harry” said the kind voice of Kathy

Harry looked up... he didn't know whether he should be happy for her or angry at her... but it didn't matter...

“Leave me alone...”

Kathy didn't hesitate, she looked at her parents and went to hug them before leaving the marketplace.

The marketplace was silent as Harry sobbed silently... Harry couldn't help it... he was losing it... he wanted to do something rash... something big, something that will make progress... Skyld wasn't so important now... he wanted to go home. He wanted to –

“EEEE!!” Kathy screamed

Harry looked up and saw Kathy pointing to Rapticon Sr.'s body which stood to a sitting position instantly.

“P-Professor?!” Harry gasped

Rapticon Sr. didn't listen, he took out a radio from his pocket.

“We're clear!” he announced to the radio “Kathy's parents are in check!”

“Got it, doc” said the voice of Fenrir

Harry didn't know what to say, what happened?!

“H-How did – when – where how?!” Harry stammered in disbelief as he walked and crouched before Rapticon Sr. “I thought you were dead!”

“I never died,” Rapticon Sr. said smiling and he unbuttoned his black coat and revealed what seems to be something shiny... a metal ringmail “Got it at that store –” he pointed at the nearest armor shop “ – for five hundred gil. I didn't expect her to shoot me but what the hell – hey!”

Harry couldn't help it, he leapt and hugged Rapticon Sr. praising that he wasn't dead.

“Woah, hold on there!” Rapticon Sr. laughed as he pulled Harry away “We got work to do” he said seriously

"I know!" Harry said "We need to get Hermione!"

Like before Rapticon Sr. didn't listen to Harry and spoke to the radio.

"Did you catch what Julia said, Fenrir?"

"Yep!" said the southern accent voice of Fenrir "Ol' Snape is comin' to town"

"Got the airship ready?" Rapticon Sr. said

"Just as you planned, doc" said Fenrir sounding as if he was distracted with controls "You have to take Kathy and her parents along for the ride, ya know"

"I know that" Rapticon Sr. said "How's Hermione?"

Harry's heart leapt again. Hermione?

"What?!" Harry looked at Rapticon Sr. in disbelief again

"I'll explain everything when we get to the airship cab that Fenrir got for us, now quick we have to move now!" Rapticon Sr. said and looked at Kathy "Kathy, we need you to come with us"

"B-But –" she retorted

"The Mercs will realize the decoy isn't Hermione. They'll be back soon and they'll make you a target and I don't want that, so I beg you to come with us to Skyld. You'll be protected there"

Kathy looked at her parents. The parents looked oblivious to make decisions so Kathy looked at Rapticon Sr.

"You got my parents back..." she smiled "Just as you promised"

- - -

Last night, Rapticon Sr. dragged Kathy to the corner of the empty living room. Learning of her problem with the Mercs, he developed a plan that will benefit the two of them. The Mercs arriving to get Rapticon Sr. and his companion didn't bode well with him when he extracted the information from Kathy.

"I swear, we'll make sure your family will be safe" he said to her "Otherwise, they will die."

Kathy gulped.

"I – I don't want to do anything to hurt anyone... I just want my mom and dad back"

"Don't worry... you will get them... I promise you. You told me the Mercs contacted you about our arrival... they said they'll come here tomorrow, right? That in exchange of your parents freedom, you'll have to give up Hermione?"

"Yes," she said frowning

"The exchange will happen... but I need you to pull a lot of acting on your part" Rapticon Sr. chuckled

"But what if you die - ?"

"I will find a way to avoid that, don't worry" Rapticon Sr. nodded "But until then... whatever you do with us for tonight... Don't get involved."

Kathy nodded.

"I promise you'll get them back... I know I wouldn't want to be locked up too so we have to help each other... I will get them back... I swear" said Rapticon Sr.

"Alright," said Kathy "Don't get involved, I'll remember that"

"Don't get involved" Rapticon Sr. smirked.

- - -

“I know, Kathy” Rapticon Sr. said “I want you to trust me”

Kathy smirked and nodded

“Good, now let’s go!”

Rapticon Sr., Harry, Kathy and her parents raced down the marketplace and into the new avenue towards the airship depot.

“You have a lot of explaining to do when we get to that ship!” Harry bellowed in mock anger

“I know” Rapticon Sr. said for the umpteenth time “Sorry if I had to use Hermione there and didn’t tell you –“

“Who was the decoy?” Harry asked

“Someone Kathy told me that she wanted to take care of...” Rapticon Sr. grinned “To Skyld?”

Harry nodded

“To Skyld”

With a new companion (with her parents), our two heroes race to the airship depot hoping that they’ll fly in freedom.

- - -

“Don’t worry, Hermione” said Elias as he untied the black bag’s string on her head “You’ll be alright –“

Elias was sitting at the back of the truck eager to see Hermione’s condition. When he removed the bag from her head –

“NYAH!!” he yelped

“What?” Julia asked from the front

“DeGroot?!” Shen asked in shock

The decoy turned out to be the woman who was the lobby lady at the Windsor Inn... the woman who kept watch on Kathy just incase she did something rash. At this revelation, Ickis laughed.

“You goy screwed by that Potter boy!”

Elias in anger screamed

“CURSE YOU, HARRY POTTER!!”

The trip to Skyld is coming closer... it will only be a matter of time where all the pieces are finally in place.

Read and Review, please!